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The Emergence and Development of Digital Film-Making in Iran

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# **Abstract**

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The Emergence and Development of Digital Film-Making in Iran

Keywords: Cinema, Digital, Reality, Special Effects, Iran, Kiarostami, Panahi, Ghobadi, Representation, Neo-realism.

Iranian digital film-making, which has emerged and developed since 2000 in the Iranian cinematic context, mainly follows a trend based on the nature of new media. However, this trend is subject to fluctuation because of specific aspects of Iranian cinema. In addition, due to the realistic cinematic culture of Iran and the presence of Iranian neorealism film-makers, we face the emergence of a new kind of film-making which has certain international effects in world cinema. These film-makers have found a new method to approach reality and represent it in their films. On the other hand, this new cinematic reality contains more elements from a representation of reality than the analogue one, due to the power of digital cameras and technology.

In this research, firstly I investigate the emergence of digital film-making in Iran, which may be unique to some extent compared to other parts of world cinema, and I show the gradual development of this phenomenon up to 2013. This investigation will reveal which parts of Iranian cinema have undergone the most changes. In the next steps, I focus on Iranian neorealism (Iranian art house cinema) and also on Iranian big-budget films. In the former, I focus on changes in the 'representation of reality', which I argue is the main characteristic of this mode, and in the latter I show the newly established relationship between governmental desire and the new digital special effects. Thus, I believe I will cover most of the changes that have been occurring in Iranian cinema due to the digitalisation process.

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# **Introduction**

Iranian cinema, now a distinguished part of world cinema with more than a century of history, has undergone some changes in style and form during its history. These are due to various cultural and political changes as well as technological developments, interacting and exchanging influences with other parts of world cinema. In this thesis I investigate the introduction of digital technology (devices and ideas) to Iranian cinema and explore the interaction of traditional Iranian cinema with this new phenomenon. As digital cinema has been introduced to Iran very gradually and the digital production process has been mainly through devices, especially small mobile cameras, I will focus on digital film-making (practice) rather than all aspects of digital cinema. I do so because, on the one hand, we can find sufficient case-studies for investigation in this regard and, on the other hand, certain other aspects of digital cinema, such as exhibition, have recently been introduced in Iran and we need more time to assess and investigate their effects. Thus, I briefly mention these aspects in a few sections in the second chapter. I then argue that the new born Iranian digital film-making has certain characteristics of style and form that may influence world cinema. I also argue that the ideological context of Iranian digital film-making has prompted the emergence of some new approaches to digital special effects as a prospect of Iranian digital film-making.

Looking at the new Iranian cinema discourse, and taking 'The Emergence and Development of Digital Film-making in Iran' as the subject of this dissertation, I consider two different realms of film and cinema studies. Firstly, 'Digital Cinema', which goes back to the 1990s, and secondly, 'Iranian Cinema', which goes back a century. Finding the common elements of production of Iranian and digital cinema and investigating how these affect each other (regardless of whether these effects are new or are found in other contexts and traditions of film-making) is the first requirement of research in this area. Thus, it is not the purpose of this thesis to talk about cinema production which does not have considerable presentation and influence in the world of cinema. If the statement by Amir Naderi, the Iranian-American film-maker, is only partially true when he claimed that "half of the films made by young directors from around the world now [are] paying homage to Iranian cinema, quoting them, adopting, adapting, mimicking, or reformulating them, in sometimes creative and sometimes curious ways" (Dabashi, 2007, pp. 16-17), this area is worthy of being the subject of an

academic research study. Observing the Iranian cinema from the late 1990s, one can detect a trend of digital film-making that is rooted in the tradition of independent Iranian films and Iranian neorealism (in other words, para-realism). As Dabashi argues, "On occasions, Iranian cinema has been called Iranian Neorealism, perhaps in deference to Italian Neorealism and its obvious influence." (Dabashi, 2007, p.443), but when I come to the digital era I find several changes in devices, film-makers and audiences that surely affect the value and message of this cinema; moreover, film becomes more accessible to both the film-maker and the audience.

I focus on the production of digital films in Iran because, firstly, Iran has an established analogue cinema that goes back over a century and gives researchers adequate examples and case-studies to compare analogue and digital film-making and trace the precise changes that occurred because of digital devices in general and mobile digital cameras in particular. Secondly, with reference to what I present in the literature review, Iran occupies a distinguished and admired position in world cinema, and the digital films that have been made in this context are recognised, watched, appreciated and also criticised throughout the world; therefore, Iranian digital film-making has a potentially significant role among independent films in world cinema, as we find in the case of Kiarostami's works. Thirdly, as an author and researcher, I have been observing and practising in this context for fifteen years and have dealt closely with Iranian cinema and the introduction of digital devices in film-making; thus, I have a good overview of the subject and am able to avoid adopting the wrong paths.

In this research, I intend to discuss two aspects of digital film-making in Iran: the representation of reality in digital films, and the usage and prospects of digital special effects. As this subject is intact in terms of a PhD dissertation, I must offer an overview of this phenomenon before discussing the main subjects; thus, I describe the emergence of digital cinema in the second chapter. Of course, there are other approaches to digital cinema, especially as the subject of a dissertation, such as a political approach, but I wish to avoid contributing to these approaches because, on the one hand, these two aspects and their introduction are sufficiently lengthy and narrow for a PhD dissertation and, on the other hand, they can offer a new and satisfactory approach to this subject

and answer my main research question. I briefly mention some of these approaches, such as a political approach, in the literature review but in the main research I do not intend to adopt them, as some of them could be ethically harmful for the researcher. For example, the subject of censorship is one of the main political issues in this regard, but I do not intend to discuss it unless it relates to my approach; thus, I partially mention it in terms of the black market and digital distribution in the second chapter.

In this research, firstly I investigate the emergence of digital film-making in Iran, which may be unique to some extent compared to other parts of world cinema, and I show the gradual development of this phenomenon up to 2013. This part gives readers an overview toward the subject. This investigation will reveal which parts of Iranian cinema have undergone the most changes. In the next steps, I focus on Iranian neorealism (Iranian art house cinema) and also on Iranian big-budget films. In the former, I focus on changes in the 'representation of reality', which I argue is the main characteristic of this mode, and in the latter I show the newly established relationship between governmental desire and the new CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) technology. Thus, I believe I will cover most of the changes that have been occurring in Iranian film-making due to the digitalisation process.

### *Subject of the Research*

In terms of production, digital film-making in Iran coincides with the arrival of the first digital cameras in the late 1990s, although Iranian cinema had been affected by digital non-linear editing a few years earlier. In this research, the term "Iranian digital cinema" applies to Iranian film that has used digital devices in any part of its production process from pre-production to post-production. Among this kind of cinema, which contains digital distribution and digital exhibition, I focus only on "Iranian Digital Film-making" and investigate all the films that have been produced digitally. Of course, I mention and briefly investigate digital distribution and exhibition in Iran in the second chapter as they partially affect digital film-making, particularly in the post-production process. In fact, I focus on digital film-making as there are more case-studies for investigation and there is more than a decade's worth of films in which to find the interactions between this kind of film-making and its context. Moreover,

among the different aspects of digital film-making based on theories and practice, I believe that the mobile camera has had the greatest effect on independent film-making, which I discuss in the third chapter. Although we will be investigating in more detail the first digital film made in Iran in the second chapter of this dissertation, we will be mainly concerned with the films that were produced in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when digital cinema influenced Iranian cinema and started to gain recognition at some international film festivals. Nevertheless, I will mention some of the important products of Iranian film up to 2013. Although the works of four internationally recognised film-makers, namely Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Jafar Panahi and Bahman Ghobadi, are the main signposts in this research, I also investigate young Iranian directors who have used digital devices, especially in the areas of production.

In general, I follow and describe the digitalisation process from the beginning in all aspects of Iranian filmmaking and its interaction with the main body of Iranian cinema and its technicians. I then focus on two narrower parts of this subject, Iranian neorealist films and Iranian big-budget films, which require further investigation. I chose three case-studies from the digital works of Iranian neorealist film-makers - *Ten* (2002) by Abbas Kiarostami, *Offside* (2006) by Jafar Panahi and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009) by Bahman Ghobadi - analysing and comparing them with the pre-digital work of these film-makers - *Taste of Cherry* (1997) by Kiarostami, *The Circle* (2000) by Panahi and *Half Moon* (2006) by Ghobadi – in order to demonstrate the changes that have occurred in Iranian neorealism, particularly the representation of reality in film due to the digitalisation process. I chose to analyse *Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) by Shahryar Bahrani in order to investigate the prospects of Iranian cinema in terms of Digital Special Effects and the cinema of spectacle. As we have several case-studies in terms of Iranian neorealism and because the literature on this part is richer than on big-budget films, it contains the main body of my thesis. However, my investigation of each part differs from that of the others; in the first part, I discuss the representation of reality, while in the second I focus on digital special effects and their usage and prospects in Iran.

## *Research Questions*

The main research question is: “How have the new forms of film-making opened up different kinds of film in Iran?” This question investigates the possibility of presenting a new kind of film in the realm of Iranian cinema in the circumstances offered by digital film-making as a technological gift. However, before that, I should answer two other questions which refer to two different aspects of film-making in Iran in the digital era; Independent Iranian neorealist film-making and governmental big-budget film-making. For the former, we should answer this question: “To what extent does digital film-making affect the representation of reality in neorealist Iranian film?” For the latter, we intend to answer this question: “How do digital special effects in digital cinema confirm the basic myths and traditions of the dominant ideology in Iran?” As neorealist cinema is the most important part of Iranian cinema and we have lot of case-studies to investigate in this regard, the answer to the first question is more detailed and occupies the main part of this research. By answering these questions, I can describe the new digital film-making in Iran in terms of two aspects in order to answer my main research question.

## *Outline of the PhD Thesis*

The thesis contains four major chapters, and each chapter contains one or more sections. The major parts of the thesis are as follows: introduction, literature review, progress of digital film-making in Iran, representation of reality in Iranian digital cinema, prospects of Iranian digital film-making. Based on these parts, the format of this dissertation is as follows:

In the introduction I will describe the subject and research questions, defining the digital cinema in this research and describing the subject based on the theoretical back ground of research in this area. This includes theoretical debates on new media and digital cinema; it also defines digital cinema and provides a theoretical explanation of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, especially Iranian neorealism. Next, the methods of this research are discussed. As this research is empirical, one of main methods is interviewing. I adopt interviews to gather data from directors and film-makers working in this field as well as from other informed individuals who have not yet published their



knowledge on this subject. After comparing the different interview methods I decided to use semi-structured and open interviews. Thus, in some cases, I considered some main specific questions for all individuals to obtain more knowledge and reduce the likelihood of losing information. The second method is the analysis of films selected as case-studies.

In the first chapter, the 'literature review' is presented to indicate the previous research in this area. As research has progressed, Iranian digital film-making has not been the subject of academic research; however there is sufficient research on Iranian cinema that is related to digital cinema or the case-studies that I chose for investigation. In chapter two, 'Progress of Digital Cinema in Iran', I describe the history of the emerging digital cinema from the time that the first digital devices were introduced into Iran until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I also examine the more recent years up to 2013 when I partially finished this research. I think that a decade is adequate for observing the characteristics of digital film-making as a part of digital cinema in Iran. This chapter is divided into several sections which investigate the three main aspects of digital cinema; production, distribution and exhibition. However, as my research is focused on digital filmmaking I only briefly mention digital distribution and exhibition. In the case of production, the digital films that were produced in Iran are discussed and the roles of digital devices in producing these films, as well as some cultural events that affected this trend, are also mentioned. In the case of distribution, I describe the development of digital distribution in Iran. I also briefly describe the role of the Internet, the DVD and CD market and the black market. Although digital exhibition was not developed in Iran until 2010, certain activities that occurred during these years related to this are revealed in interviews with governmental managers. Then I discuss how and why screening in Iranian cinema theatres was fully digitalised during 2013 and 2014.

In chapter three, I will begin to explore the characteristics of digital film-making in Iran by investigating the representation of reality in Iranian digital films. On the one hand I adopt Hamid Naficy's (2011b) notion of Iranian Neorealism and Iranian art house cinema to show how the new Iranian digital film-making reinforced the trend of Iranian cinema to present a new genre in terms of representation of reality.

In chapter four, Prospects of Digital Film-making in Iran, I will focus on Iranian big-budget films that are supported by the government and will examine Iranian digital film-making in terms of special effects. I will examine the *Kingdom of Solomon* by Shahryar Bahrani, which was supported by the government, to show the extent to which digital cinema can represent the myths and beliefs of the religious dominant ideology.

In the fifth chapter, the Conclusion, I declare that Iranian digital film-making can be distinguished from other types by its emergence and prospects (special relationship with digital special effects) and also by its special forms that have developed in Iranian neorealist cinema and that can produce the new kind of films that are internationally recognisable by their characteristics.

### *Pertinence of the Subject*

Digital cinema is gradually replacing traditional cinema in every aspect, from production to exhibition, and Iranian cinema, as an impressive part of world cinema, is affected by these changes. It is important to study this interactive effect from different perspectives. Digital films in a new cultural context reveals some new effects that should be considered as the potential power of digital film-making; this may recur when digital film-making as a part of digital cinema is introduced to other developing countries. In 2000, Samira Makhmalbaf, the youngest Iranian film-maker (in 2000) at the Cannes Film Festival, said that "Cinema has always been at the mercy of political power, particularly in the East ... with astonishing technological innovations now coming to fruition, artists no longer seem to be totally vulnerable to these impediments" (Makhmalbaf, 2000). Although, in 2000, only a handful of film-makers were utilising this kind of new technology to make films in Iran, gradually most Iranian film-makers have become involved in the digitalisation of Iranian cinema and its consequences.

Working as an Iranian film-maker, I have observed this process for a long time (over 14 years) and have undertaken significant practical work in this respect. I feel that a decade is sufficient for showing some of the effects of digital cinema in an Iranian cinematic discourse. As a researcher who is involved with a wide range of Iranian films, I am acutely aware of the scarcity of research on digital films in Iran.

## *Aims and Objectives*

My research intends to describe Iranian digital film-making in its context and examine its characteristics. In investigating Iranian digital film-making, I will consider some of the facilities that digital cinema provides for film-making in Iranian cinema and their effects on films.

In this regard, I investigate the representation of reality in Iranian neorealist digital film. As one of the characteristics of Iranian cinema, the method of representation of reality is affected by digital film-making, and I will try to explain the new representation of reality in Iranian neorealist digital film as a step towards providing a true picture of digital film-making in Iran.

Digital film-making has emerged as a new phenomenon (in and beyond traditional cinema) in the Iranian cinematic context and it has established an interaction with it. Showing the improvement of special effects in new Iranian cinema, I will demonstrate the possibility of showing the myths and beliefs of the dominant ideology using digital special effects and the reason why they have attracted government support.

The final objective of this research is to describe the digital films that were produced in the Iranian digital cinema during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as these are new kinds of film with special characteristics among other kinds of digital films, which are part of world cinema. This will be achieved after several aspects of digital Iranian film-making have been investigated.

## *Contribution to Knowledge*

This dissertation studies and discusses the scholarship that relates to the areas of cultural studies, digital cinema, film studies, and media studies; it will do so by

- Describing Iranian digital film-making as a new kind of film-making in the era of digitalisation
- Debating the relationship between reality and cinematic realism in traditional cinema and digital cinema
- Debating the differences between new media and old media in cinematic discourse

- Describing the new relationship between digital special effects and religious ideology in Iran.

Although Iranian cinema is recognised as an important part of the cinema world and some research on this subject has been conducted, thus far the field of digital cinema in Iran suffers from a scarcity of academic investigation. I mention those studies that mainly focused on Kiarostami's digital works and in particular *Ten* (2002) in the literature review. Through the interviews I conducted, I have tried to distinguish Iranian digital film-making as an effective part of today's Iranian cinema. I also try to show that Iranian digital films are finding a new role in the cinema world by the new kind of representation of reality and production of films.

For the first time, I will interview some government officials as well as some merchants to show the real progress and development of digital cinema when introduced to a strong context of film-making in a semi-closed society.

By interviewing some famous Iranian directors such as Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Bahman Ghobadi about digital cinema, I have tried to identify some of the techniques as well as experience that they apply in their films and discuss the relationships between digital film-making and Iranian cinema that existed before the introduction of digital cinema.

Interviews offer a sufficient way of researching and investigating the development of digital film-making in Iran as there is a scarcity of academic research on this subject. Thus, a lot of information about the history and characteristics of digital film-making can be revealed using this method. I also interviewed some masters of cinematography who use digital cameras in Iran, inviting them to describe the artistic aspects of Iranian digital film-making. In fact, dealing with well-known artists, directors and technicians for gathering information on the one hand and considering the researcher (interviewer) as an artist and director in Iranian cinema on the other hand, the interviews (particularly open and semi structured method) gave the interviewees more confidence in offering a truthful explanation of the history of Iranian cinema. I had the opportunity to investigate some subject more deeply and precisely, such as resistance to digitalisation.

This dissertation investigates the realm of digital cinema in Iran for the first time, and it will contribute to knowledge about digital cinema, especially in a developing country.

To sum up, this research illustrates two aspects of digital film-making as part of digital cinema in Iran for the first time. Firstly, it establishes an academic history of digital cinema in Iran. Secondly, it recognises the characteristics of this new wave and investigates it as a new kind of film-making that interacts with the cinema world. In this regard I contribute and add to the knowledge about Iranian cinema in two ways I show and explain the changes in the characteristics of neorealist film in the digital era and I find and describe the new relationship between big-budget Iranian digital film and religious ideology in term of digital special effects. These finding introduce digital film-making as a distinguished part of Iranian cinema.

## *Theory and Methodology*

In examining cinema as a new medium, I use Lev Manovich's (2001) theories. He believes that "The computerization of culture not only leads to the emergence of new cultural forms such as computer games and virtual worlds; it redefines existing ones such as photography and cinema" (Manovich, 2001, p. 35). In fact, "As traditional film technology is universally being replaced by digital technology, the logic of the filmmaking process is being redefined" (Manovich, 2001, p. 253). In Iran, I have experienced this replacement since 2000. Thus I investigate this replacement from early 2000 in the second chapter. In the case of cinema, I adopt the notion that "all new media objects, whether they are created from scratch on computers or converted from analogue media sources, are composed of digital code; they are numerical representations" (Manovich, 2001, p.49). In this regard, I considered all films that have been converted to a digital format in the process from pre-production to post-production as a part of digital cinema. Thus, I will investigate products which have merely been edited in digital format, such as *Kingdom of Solomon*, as well as products that have been filmed in digital. I point out the modularity following Dale (2008) and Munt (2006) in analysing Kiarostami's digital works, adopting Manovich's notion: "In contrast, just as it is the case with traditional media, deleting parts of a new media object does not render its meaningless. In fact, the modular structure of

new media makes such deletion and substitution of parts particularly easy” (Manovich, 2001, p.31). I will consider this modular structure and usage of deletion in making films in the case of *Ten* in the third chapter. Moreover, Manovich’s ideas about the ‘cultural layer’ and ‘computer layer’ in new media, which affect each other, will help us to understand the struggles and historical progress of digital editing and sound design in Iran. According to interviews conducted with technicians, editors and sound designers, I discovered that the hierarchy of some cinematic guilds was changed. I consider that hierarchy and the discipline between master and apprentice as a cultural layer which has been affected by computers and their user-friendly interface.

Among the aspects of cinema which, have been changed and influenced by computer culture, I will focus mainly on the elements that I find in Iranian digital cinema in general and in Iranian digital neorealism in particular. In this case, “the mobile camera” is “probably the most important case of cinema's influence on cultural interfaces” (Manovich 2001 : p.79), although I may find something more profound in investigating the progress of digital cinema in Iran; the interviews I conducted revealed that it is partially about ‘computer culture’. However, in the second chapter when I talk about editing and cinematography, I show that there is concern among Iranian technicians and masters about how easy it has become to create cinematic language which has been facilitated by technology and computers. This concern has shaped the history of Iranian cinema and its direction. In fact, Manovich’s theories helped me to find a description and structure for the investigation of digital films and film-making in Iran. I then used other theories and research methods to investigate and describe Iranian digital film-making and find the aspects requiring in-depth investigation in order to find its new or changed characteristics.

Although I used Manovich’s notion to find a framework for my research and predict some of my findings based on what has happened in the rest of the world and the nature of new media, my main focus is on the knowledge and findings obtained through the interviews and the analysis of Iranian films. Moreover, as a film-maker who has spent fifteen years in the field of digital film-making in Iran, I had an overview of what has happened in this context, which prevented me from adopting the wrong path in investigating this subject. My experience in this field helped me not only to anticipate some findings but also

to find and recognise the difference between the changes brought by digital devices to the Iranian cinema and what was happen in the Western countries. For example, in the case of the cultural layer, which I faced in my experience, Dehghani (2012) emphasised in his interview that digital editing does not change the number of assistants helping the editor; it just changes the assistants' specialisation. Meanwhile, in Hollywood digital services have cut the number of assistants, and the editor as manager deals with fewer people in the digital era.

In the fourth chapter I review contributions by Gunning (1995) and Bolter and Grusin (2000) about "cinema attraction" and examine the prospects of digital film-making in Iran as it relates to certain Iranian religious and mystical thoughts. I use this notion to show how digital cinema can confirm the myths and beliefs of the dominant ideology. This investigation is based on 'astonishment' and 'wondering' notions in mystical and religious experiments that I discussed in the last chapter of my book *Mysticism and Cinema of Today*, and I compare them with Bolter and Grusin's reading of 'cinema attraction'.

Although Gunning originally adopted the notion of 'cinema attraction' for early cinema, he believes that this aspect of cinema has survived in narrative cinema. He believes that "the spectacle film traditionally proved true to its name by highlighting moments of pure visual stimulation along with narrative" (Gunning, 1986, p. 68). I point to Gunning's idea about cinema attraction when I discuss the importance of spectacular cinema for religious ideology but I will also go beyond his primary idea and mention Bolter and Grusin's adaptation of it. Bolter and Grusin's adaptation of Gunning's theory is based on their notion of immediacy in new digital media and, in this case, digital cinema. Gunning, talking about early movies believes that: "The gap between what they knew to be true and what their eyes told them" astonished the audience (Bolter and Grusin, 2002, p155). This new attitude to the attraction of the early movie continues in narrative cinema and even in the Hollywood blockbuster to some extent. Bolter and Grusin believe this notion helps us to discover the "ways in which the logic of transparency can sometimes operate" (Bolter and Grusin, 2002, p155). In other words, "The turn-of-the-century audience became conscious of the gap between what it knew and what it saw, then we could also say that the audience became conscious of its desire for immediacy" (Bolter

and Grusin, 2002, p155). In fact, Bolter and Grusin find a kind of wonder and amazement at what digital cinema, with its modern technology for the generation of CGI and visual special effects, can reproduce. They believe that “The audience for Steven Spielberg’s films knows that the dinosaurs are animatronic or wholly computer generated, and the wonder is that these devices look so lifelike and interact so realistically with the human figures” (Bolter and Grusin, 2002, p157). In the fourth chapter I explain that the religious government was able to look for this kind of wonder and amazement by showing the miracle performed by Solomon.

Finding a relationship between the dominant religious ideology and modern digital special effects, I analyse the case-study and extract the religious codes that appeal to the dominant ideology. In the case of Iranian digital cinema, I can also point to the desire of religious ideology for the use of a sense of wonder and amazement based on Abdolkarim Soroush’s (an Iranian religion and cultural theorist) reading of Iranian mysticism and religious culture. I show how to interpret the attempt at making big-budget films and show some myths, creatures and monsters created by CGI based on religious beliefs; I also discuss the prospect of this kind of Iranian digital cinema being funded by the government of Iran. Besides the use of Soroush’s notion in his book *Farbeh tar az Ideology* (stronger than ideology) (1996), I went in search of some old texts by Islamic writers for more evidence. In this case I tidy up the theories and notions that I used in my book *Mysticism and Cinema of Today*, published in 1999, and attempt to use this theory in general.

I use the notions of several film theorists in the third chapter, on the representation of reality and digital cinema. I refer to André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, Jean-Luc Godard, Alexandre Astruc and François Truffaut, but I am particularly interested in the notions of Abbas Kiarostami and his disciples (Panahi and Ghobadi). I found Bazin’s and Godard’s notions of reality very useful, as well as Laura Mulvey’s theory and her particular ideas about Abbas Kiarostami. On the other hand, regarding the strong bond between Iranian neorealism and documentary I have referred extensively to Bill Nichols’s book *Representing Reality* (1991) while at the same time investigating the ideas of some documentary film-makers who have interesting ideas about digital film-making, such as Errol Morris, Brian Hill and Chris Petit. I felt that some of their



experiences of using digital technology in practice will be very useful when I investigate the digital phenomenon in the Iranian context. I explain how these new digital techniques and mobile cameras have changed the shape of neorealist cinema in Iran.

I used the term 'Iranian neorealism' in this thesis to refer to the artistic side of Iranian cinema after the Islamic revolution. However, there is some controversy about this term and its use in the case of Iranian cinema, which I will explain in the literature review. Thus, I choose the term "Iranian Art House Cinema" which Hamid Naficy uses in his Article 'Neorealism Iranian Style'. With this term he offers a new perspective on Iranian cinema, especially those parts that are acclaimed by Western critics and film festivals. He adopts Georges Sadoul's ideas and definition of neorealism and mentions certain aspects of it, such as the "formation of a set of rules (location shooting, long takes, invisible style of filming and editing, predominance of medium and long shots, use of contemporary true-to-life subjects, open-ended plots, working-class protagonists, nonprofessional cast, vernacular dialogue, implied social criticism)" (Naficy, 2011b, p 226); a researcher can find many similarities between Italian neorealism and the Iranian version, especially Iranian 'art house' films. In fact, he offers a description of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema that can be adapted to the films produced in that discourse. Based on his idea, "the art house cinema filmmakers experimented most deeply, widely, and successfully with neorealism's philosophic and stylistic tenets" (Naficy, 2011b, p 233). However, there are other ideas about Iranian neorealism which I consider and use in analysing films. In other words, although I use the term 'Iranian Art House Cinema', I also consider the notions of scholars such as Hamid Dabashi and Laura Mulvey and try to have a comprehensive perspective from this side of Iranian cinema to better investigate Iranian digital film-making. Dabashi (2007) mainly focuses on the poetical side of Iranian cinema by using the idea of Iranian Para-realism to describe Iranian cinema, while Mulvey (2007) focuses on Kiarostami as a special case in Iranian cinema, particularly digital cinema. In fact, I try to avoid controversies around the term 'neorealism' and use this idea to better distinguish and define this side of Iranian cinema. I also investigate what happened following the introduction of digital devices in this part of cinema via the interviews and film analysis.

I used qualitative interviews and film analysis to investigate the progress of digital cinema in Iran. Although I dealt closely with the development of digital cinema in Iran as a film-maker for fifteen years, examining some relevant theories in practice and facing the problems myself, I prepared three field trips to Iran during my research to investigate the situation of digital film-making in Iran, update my information and conduct face-to-face interviews with my chosen interviewees in this field. In fact, in my first docudrama *The Loneliness of Mourning Play Actor* (2001), I practically used digital mobile cameras to capture reality and experienced the user-friendly digital editing devices, as explained in the fourth volume of *Social History of Iranian Cinema* about my work (Naficy, 2012). Since then I have been monitoring most of the activities of technicians and masters of Iranian cinema and have also improved my subsequent movies and documentaries. However, in my field trips I re-examined all my previous knowledge by interviewing the masters, technicians and authorities (whom I name and explain in detail in the next section); I found a new overview of this subject and revised my previous findings. Each of my field trips took three month; I had enough time to rebuild some old connections with film-makers and obtained permission to interview some authorities. Thus, I had a special opportunity to practically experience the subject and then examine it via the academic method.

I used Yin's (2009) case-study approach to choose interviewees and films for analysis, because digital cinema is a "contemporary phenomenon within the real life context" (Yin, 2009: p.2), and written academic knowledge of this area in Iran is very limited. However, to some extent a case-study can be considered as an entire research population. *Kingdom of Solomon*, which I chose for film analysis, was a unique case, at that time (2012), of a big-budget film in Iran that used professional CGI. Therefore the film analysis in the fourth chapter is shorter than in the other chapters. Regarding the choice of films as case-studies in the third chapter, I tried to cover the whole area of Iranian neorealism in terms of style and date as well as considering the new films' comparability with the previous analogue films of the same directors. As for the interviews, which I used mainly in the second chapter, I also tried to cover all aspects of digital cinema in Iran and interviewed people who have played major roles in this respect to produce a true description of the emergence and progress of this

phenomenon in Iran and to fill the gaps in the scant academic research. Of course, I also made some use of certain trustworthy documents and interviews that had already been published, such as *Modern Cinema* (published in 2008), in the event of me being unable to initially find sufficient new material.

I adopted qualitative interviewing as one of the main methods of gathering data about digital film-making in Iran, because there is a lot information about techniques, methods and strategies in terms of digital film-making which have not been published. This information has been kept between masters and apprentices (in the case of masters and technicians) or simply forgotten with the passage of time (in terms of the authorities' strategy). Interviews, some of them in-depth, have helped me to find, recall and document this information. I used different methods of in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with chosen individuals in the film industry to ask relevant exploratory questions. I also preferred face-to-face interviews in my field trips because, based on my knowledge of the subject, I could design the interviews and extract more information from the interviewees or help them to express their ideas clearly. I will name and explain the professions of the interviewees in the next section about my empirical research. They cover the whole range of my study of digital film-making, from technical and artistic aspects to governmental supervision. In particular, in the case of technical and artistic aspects I tried to find and interview masters who have influenced other technicians and film-makers in Iran, although I did not ignore some talented young technicians who were brave enough to be in the first line of technological change, such as Toraj Aslani.

In fact, "Design in qualitative interviews at first seems unsystematic, but what appears chaotic is merely a continuous redesign. With continuous design, you keep building on your new findings, while gathering evidence for testing, and changing your emerging theory." (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p62-63). This is what happened when I interviewed Mohsen Makhmalbaf and compared what he said with Kiarostami's ideas. In order to obtain data and information about the progress of digital cinema in Iran, I had to conduct a wide range of interviews with various people who work in this area or have influence and experience in this regard. I can categorise the interviewees into three groups: Artists, technicians and managers. Although my questions for each of these groups were pre-structured and I was looking for certain information, my approach to

each category, and sometimes to different people in a category, was different. In particular, for the group of artists (film-makers) I sometimes conducted open and deep interviews, as with Kiarostami in both his interviews, but I sometimes had to conduct structured interviews, as was the case with Bahman Ghobadi. Although it was easier to interview the technicians of digital cinema using the semi-structured method, I sometimes needed to conduct in-depth interviews with cultural managers of Iranian cinema to obtain information and hold pre-discussions to find common points about the definition of digital cinema. Although the interviews were about the technological and historical aspects of cinema and there were no ethical issues in general, in the case of Jafar Panahi I decided to cancel a direct interview with him for ethical reasons, to avoid any harm to him or the interviewer<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, I interviewed his friend and the co-director of *This Is Not a Film* (2012), Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, in that particular case.

My approach to film analysis owes much to the work of Roland Barthes (1967) and his concept of semiotic analysis. Nevertheless, we should undertake film analysis with methods that are designed specifically for films. I deliberately investigate and merge several methods to examine the case-studies because of the range and complex context of Iranian culture and films, as well as the new phenomenon of digital technology. Thus, I partially considered Keith Selby & Ron Cowdery's (1995) method, described in their book entitled *How to Study Television*. 'Construction' is one of the major concepts that they explain: "The idea that all media texts are constructed using a media language and that the codes which are chosen also convey certain cultural information" (Selby and Cowdery, 1995, p.13). They consider two aspects of construction: 1) *Mise-en-scene* as a formal code of construction that includes: (a) Settings, (b) Props, (c) Codes of non-verbal communication and (d) Codes of dress; and 2) *Technical codes* of construction that include shot size, camera angle, lens type, composition, focus, lighting codes, colour and film stock codes. I also considered James Monaco's notions and methods explained in *How to Read Film* (2009), particularly the technological aspects of film and images and sound. Nevertheless, in practice I preferred to choose categories and methods suggested by two master digital film-makers, Abbas Kiarostami in his

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<sup>1</sup> Panahi is banned from giving interviews as part of his official sentences; hence, interviewing him might have been against the law and might have had harmful consequences for him and the interviewer.

documentary *10 on Ten* (2004) and Mike Figgis (2007) in his book *Digital Filmmaking*, which I explain in detail in the third chapter. Therefore, the major aspects that I analysed in the third chapter, on the representation of reality in films, are as follows: 1) *subject*; 2) *actors*; 3) *location*; 4) *script*; 5) *lighting*, 6) *camera* (movement and angle); 7) *director*. These are Kiarostami's and Figgis's basic ideas about the aspects of film we should consider when comparing digital film to analogue.

### *Iranian Digital Film-Making as an empirical study*

Investigating Iranian digital film-making is an idea that supports and empowers this research as an empirical study on a subject that not only has never been considered as a subject of academic research in terms of a PhD dissertation but also has not been considered as a separate part of cinema in Iranian cinematic discourse. Thus, this research begins by observing the research topic (Iranian digital film-making) as a phenomenon that emerged around the year 2000 in the context of Iranian media and cinema.

The first step of this research was to investigate the subject and offer a definition and history of the progress of digital cinema in Iran. This definition should not differ from the definitions of new media and digital cinema in other parts of the world. Investigating the history of digital cinema in Iran is based on evidence and documents gathered by interviewing film-makers and governmental managers as well as other relevant people in the field of cinema.

According to my findings from the interviews and analysing the films of Kiarostami, Panahi and Ghobadi some aspects of Iranian cinema such as the representation of reality and the hierarchy of cinematic guilds, have been changed by digitalisation. Thus, in order to discover why these aspects have changed, I will investigate some technological points and technical methods as well as some idea and theories that masters of Iranian cinema, such as Abbas Kiarostami and others, have brought from the traditional cinema of Iran.

At the end, I add *Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) by Shahryar Bahrani to these cases, not only to show the state of digital special effects in Iranian cinema by 2010 but also to discuss how digital special effects as a gift of digital film-making can reinforce the religious myths and beliefs with the support of the

religious ideology. Thus, analysing this film give me sufficient reason for examining this idea.

I conducted interviews with different groups of top professionals in the field of digital cinema in Iran. Here, I should introduce all the interviewees and explain the definition of each group in my research. I called the first group 'artists', as it contains film-makers who mainly direct digital films, either dramas or documentaries. Most of the people in this group are also producers, editors and sometimes cinematographers. Usually they manage groups of film-makers as masters or managers of societies or guilds in Iran. Thus, they have comprehensive ideas about Iranian digital film-making. This group is listed below:

Mohsen Makhmalbaf (master and pioneer in digital cinema in Iran), Abbas Kiarostami (master and pioneer in digital cinema in Iran)), Bahman Ghobadi (internationally recognized digital film-maker), Shahab Razavian (film director, founder and board manager of the Iranian short films society), Ebrahim Mokhtari (master, film-maker, founder and board manager of the Iranian documentary film-makers society), Alireza Ghasemkhan (film-maker, former head of Iranian *cinema-tek*, board manager of the Iranian documentary film-makers society ), Mojtaba Mirtahmasb (digital film-maker, board manager of the Iranian documentary film-makers society), Mohammad Reza Arab (pioneer digital film-maker), Naser Safarian (film-maker, board manager of the Iranian documentary film-makers society), and Saied Pooresmaeili (film-maker, board manager of the Iranian short films society, DOP).

I called the second group 'technicians' in general, although theoretically and in practice they are responsible for some artistic aspects of cinema. In particular, directors of cinematography (DOP), sound designers and editors are the groups who are concerned with the artistic side of film but, as we will see, in the case of digital Iranian cinema, digitalisation was largely a technical concern for them rather than an artistic one. This group contains visual effects supervisors, digital post-production technicians and others involved in technical issues; they are listed as follows:

Tooraj Aslani (DOP, pioneer of digital cinematography), Mohammad Reza Sokoot (DOP, pioneer of digital cinematography), Masoud Salami (DOP ,

pioneer of digital cinematography), Masoud Behnam (pioneer in digital sound design and digital sound studios), Mohammad Reza Delpak (pioneer in digital sound design), Mehran Malakooti (pioneer in digital sound recording and digital sound designer), Bahram Dehghani (Master and board manager of the Iranian film editors society), Hasan Hasandoost (Master and board manager of the Iranian film editors society), Amir Masoud Babaei (pioneer in digital editing), Sasan Tavakoli Farsani (pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran), Amir Reza Motamedi (pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran), Kamran Saharkhiz (pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran and digital post-production studio), and Mohsen Sedghi (manager of digital post-production studio).

I called the third group 'managers' and they are the people who are concerned with capital, either financial or cultural, in their approach to digital cinema. Thus, this group contains producers, governmental managers, merchants, and company owners who have dealt with digital cinema. They have considerable influence on this process in Iran or are aware of these changes and supervise them to some extent. I list the names of the interviewees as follows:

Mojtaba Faravardeh (producer of *Kingdom of Solomon*), Mohamad Heydarian (producer and former cinematic deputy of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance), Alireza Rezadad (producer and former head of Farabi Cinematic Foundation and High Councillor of the Organization of Iranian Cinema), Majid Meschi (General Manager of *Cinema Shahr*, technological management of digitalizing Iranian cinema), Homan Shidrang (board manager of a digital studio), Mohamad Bashirzadeh (board manager of a digital equipment company), Fereydoon Soori (merchant, pioneer in digital camera trading), Youssef Mostafavi (merchant, pioneer in digital camera trading), Ali Ahmadi (board manager of digital company, pioneer in trading digital editing software and hardware in Iran).

As my main concern was to gather information on digital cinema in Iran, I did not ignore any important information published in this regard. In the event of me failing to find some of important people, I covered the lack of interviews with published interviews and information about that person. In the case of Kiarostami, there were sufficient published interviews with him, which are addressed in my main questions; thus, in the two interviews with him in 2012

and 2014 I mainly focused on discussing his new ideas about digital cinema and some of his special ideas on acting in the digital age in Iran, which I used in the second and third chapters.

### *Outcomes of the Research*

This research is an empirical study about new kinds of film making in Iranian cinema. It discusses this special kind of digital film making in a semi-closed country and its characteristics. In fact, I offer a new approach to Iranian cinema based on new media theories. I used interviews and film analysis to identify the progress of digital film-making since its introduction in a developing country, and I hope to achieve three outcomes from this investigation. Firstly, I will identify a pattern for developing and progressing digital film-making when it is introduced in a developing country such as Iran. Secondly, I will define and describe a new form of film-making that is emerging in Iran among neorealist film-makers . Thirdly, I will offer a new potential relationship between digital film-making and the religious dominant ideology in the use of digital special effects.



## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

Digital film-making in the Iranian cinema, or digital Iranian cinema, is a fresh subject for a PhD dissertation or any similar comprehensive academic research but there has been some research on Iranian cinema in recent years, especially since 2001, that partially deals with some of the films I investigate; it has also proposed some theories about specific films or Iranian neorealism, which I consider in my research. In fact, most of these investigations have focused on Kiarostami's works since 2000, especially *Ten* (2002). Therefore after examining the literature on Iranian cinema, I will review some books and articles on Abbas Kiarostami and his digital work. Finally, I will review some recent articles and dissertations about certain aspects of digital cinema that are fairly close to my research into digital cinema in Iran.

In fact, in this chapter I present and review the literature published about or around my research, including work on the concepts I used, the case-studies I investigated, and the special approach I adopted. In each case, I try to mention the relevance of that literature to my research and the difference in my method and approach to show what I am adding to this area of research and how I am contributing to this subject. With regard to some literature, I also mention which parts or ideas I use in my research.

### *New Iranian Cinema and Iranian Neorealism*

As I use new Iranian cinema as a context for Iranian digital cinema in this research, examining and discussing in particular Iranian neorealist films, I should discuss some of the well-known literature on this subject and show the extent to which my research has adopted those ideas on new Iranian cinema or disregarded them in order to adopt a more comprehensive view. In this section I not only review the well-known literature about recent Iranian cinema but also extract and discuss some factors (such as location) in Iranian cinema that I will use or discuss in film analysis in the coming chapters.

We can consider *Close up , Past, Present and Future of Iranian Cinema* by Hamid Dabashi, a professor at Colombia University, as among the first books to review Iranian cinematic works since the Islamic revolution, although 2001 (when this book was published) was a little too early for the emerging digital movement in Iran. He tried to investigate both sides of Iranian cinema (native and global parts) and claims that "In this reading of Iranian cinema, I have tried

to remain true to that nativity, warn against the dangers and yet celebrate the emancipatory possibilities of that globalism” (Dabashi, 2001, p.10). He interviewed some masters of Iranian cinema including Kiarostami about their works and concludes by pointing to the new generation of Iranian film-makers such as Samira Makhmalbaf and Bahman Ghobadi as future masters of Iranian cinema, although it was a little too soon to discuss them in the context of digital film. He briefly investigates the history of cinema in Iran since 1900 as part of modernity in Iran and describes the development of cinema in Iran despite the cultural and religious obstacles that existed in the Iranian context against this kind of visual art at that time. Dabashi, a specialist in the field of Iranian studies, describes the development of Iranian cinema in the context of the cultural and political changes in Iran caused by the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic revolution. He tries to track Iranian cinema and its interaction with cultural and political aspects of modernity up to the late 1980s as new contemporary Iranian cinema and some of its masters are introduced to the world. In fact, Dabashi tries to deliver and state most of his ideas about Iranian cinema at that time using different methods. He uses interviews for the chapters on Beizaei, Farman Ara and Makhmalbaf; meanwhile, to discuss Kiarostami he tries to demonstrate his development as the greatest master and internationally recognised figure in Iranian cinema by providing his biography and explaining the relationship of his work with poetry. Finally, Dabashi introduces Kiarostami as “the first visual poet of his nation” (Dabashi, 2001, p.75). However, he goes no further than Kiarostami’s trilogy- *Where is the Friend’s Home?* (1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1992), and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). Of course, as he published this book in 2001 he also mentions *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) in the concluding chapter, which discusses the future of Iranian cinema. Nevertheless, he had no idea of the notion of digital cinema in the work of Kiarostami at that time.

On the other hand, Dabashi mentions neorealism in *Close up, Past, Present and Future of Iranian Cinema* just twice. First, when he talks about Samira Makhmalbaf, he explains that “Her generation was morally and materially fed on two complementary doses [...] second, the rise of a mode of neorealism in Iranian cinema that achieved its most magnificent moments in the cinema of Bani-etemad, Kiarostami, and Makhmalbaf, and which could easily trace its

origin to another glorious achievement of Iranian cinema, Foroogh Farokhzad's *The House Is Black* (1962)" (Dabashi, 2001, pp. 267-268). Second, when he talks about the new generation of film-makers such as Samira Makhmalbaf and the ideological failure of the Islamic revolution, he adds, "what is called Iranian neorealism is this uncanny ability to concentrate on the real in such a way that reveals its irreducible 'round-about-us' nature, its ready-at-hand quality, its refusal to heed the call to arms of any ideology, religion, or culture." (Dabashi, 2001, p.271) This shows that this idea was not very common by that time because he discusses Iranian neorealism, criticises it and develops it to his idea of para-realism in his later book, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*, in 2007.

Although most books and research on Iranian cinema have used *Close Up* as an important source, I used Dabashi's recent work, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*, especially his idea of para-realism. However, I prefer to conduct this research based on the idea of neorealism (specifically Hamid Naficy's notion) - although I admire and accept Dabashi's ideas, particularly about the role of poetry in Iranian cinema - because most of the works we will investigate in this thesis are more compatible with the idea of neorealism. In his recent book, although he investigates the works of Abbas Kiarostami and Jafar Panahi, he prefers to focus on works by these two film-makers that he admires more. His investigation of Kiarostami appears to be inspired by the question about 'actual realism' and its role in Kiarostami's work. In fact, he uses Lacan's philosophy to call Kiarostami's cinema actual realism. Jacques Lacan proposes "three domains of psychic experience: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. The Lacanian imaginary realm deals in images, the symbolic realm is the domain of language, and the real is the domain of trauma that cannot be directly represented" (Corrigan, 2012). Dabashi thinks experiencing reality is achieved through the imaginary and the symbolic. He believes that the way in which Lacan "posits the two complementary categories of the imaginary and the symbolic around the defining moment of the realism [to be] very much what I have always thought of Abbas Kiarostami's cinema" (Dabashi, 2007, p.283). In the other words Dabashi believes that "Kiarostami navigates more fluently between the imaginary and the symbolic than otherwise allowed in the normative orders of his culture, history, society, religion, and metaphysics. This

makes his realism what I have always suspected it to be: actual” (Dabashi, 2007, p.283). Dabashi’s idea that “he is teaching us [...] what we have missed on the surface” (Dabashi, 2007, p.284) is useful for this thesis.

Dabashi investigates *Through the Olive Tree* (1994) rather than *Taste of Cherry* (1997), the famous Cannes film festival award-winner by Kiarostami, and also investigates *Crimson Gold* (2003) rather than *The Circle* (2000); he also virtually ignores the digital work of these two masters. In fact, Dabashi’s method based on the interesting idea of para-realism would be supported more by these masterpieces, as he would be able to find more traces of poetry in this kind of work. I will discuss the idea of Iranian neorealism and Dabashi’s para-realism further in the relevant chapter. I will also explain my choice of *Taste of Cherry* and *The Circle* as examples of the works of Kiarostami and Panahi.

We should consider Richard Tapper’s book as one of the most important academic sources in the field of Iranian cinema, as it gathers some of the famous scholars in this field for a fresh look at Iranian cinema at the beginning of the new century. *New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, edited by Tapper, focuses on post-revolutionary Iranian cinema (after 1979). As it was published in 2002, we cannot expect a serious investigation of digital cinema or work using digital cameras in this book. However, it is the one of the most prominent books about Iranian cinema before digitalisation, and it partially focuses on different aspects of artistic films and Iranian neorealism.

Although the term ‘Iranian neorealism’ or ‘neorealism in Iran’ had been used by journalists and critics for some time (and Dabashi was aware of this usage), we see scholars using this term and describing it as a mode of new Iranian cinema after the revolution for first time in this book. Tapper claims that “Iranian films have drawn international attention by their neo-realism and reflexivity...” (Tapper, 2002b, p.21). He describes low budgets and the use of amateur actors as characteristic of this kind of cinema. In addition, Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, who focuses on location in Iranian cinema in her article (we will use her idea later in the relevant chapter), recognised Iranian neorealism and considers working in real locations to be among its characteristics as well, but she believes this is a consequence of making low-budget films. We discuss location in Iranian cinema

in the relevant chapter and explain the ideas of film-makers such as Kiarostami, particularly about digital cinema, in this regard.

Finally, Laura Mulvey presents a more detailed explanation of neorealism in Iran. She believes that “Just as the first wave of pre-revolutionary directors sought to find their own neo-realism, the Revolution has, even if accidentally, generated the conditions in which innovation becomes an essential element in cinematic practice” (Mulvey, 2002, p.259). Although she mentioned the term, she still considers the Iranian cinema to be the New Wave Iranian cinema, and this is the term that most scholars, such as Dabashi (2001), choose for the works of Iranian film-makers such as Sohrab Shahid Sales, Parviz Kimiavi and others, who introduced a kind of realism to Iranian cinema before the Islamic revolution. In fact, she divides the new Iranian cinema into two waves, sometimes calling one the second New Wave Iranian post-revolutionary cinema. But as this book is about post-revolutionary cinema, she mostly uses New Wave and once calls it neorealism. She believes that the characteristic of this cinema “shrinks in scope and expands in time, moving away from dramatic plot, action or romance into scaled-down events and location-based stories of great simplicity.” (Mulvey, 2002, p.259) She also recognises a specific shooting style that encourages film-makers not to use close-ups. Also, “the camera takes on an equivalently greater importance, and its relationship to what it sees enters into the picture, breaking down the cinema’s conventional transparency” (Mulvey, 2002, p. 259). She also mentions changes in cinematic narrative in this kind of cinema. She believes that “this formal and intellectual cinema creates the ‘cinematic’ space of interaction and exchange between spectator and screen that defines art cinema.” (Mulvey, 2002, p.255) She mentions censorship as something that affects this kind of cinema. She claims it “creates a new challenge for the cinema. The need to rethink and reconfigure affects not only gender image and relations but, as a logical extension, editing, staging, ways of storytelling, processes of identification and so on” (Mulvey, 2002, p.259). Mulvey does not disagree with the scholars and critics who believe that being exotic is the reason behind the success of new Iranian cinema in Europe, but she states that “A new cinema is only of lasting interest if it articulates questions and raises problems that are of aesthetic significance in their own right” (Mulvey, 2002, p.259). She thinks political issues also increase the

strangeness and attraction of this cinema to some extent, particularly to critics in Europe.

I will use the ideas of Mulvey, Dabashi (his notion of para-realism), Naficy and others to describe Iranian Neorealism in the relevant chapter and to choose the case-studies for the investigation of the representation of reality in this research.

Generally, the articles gathered in *New Iranian Cinema*, although not discussing or mentioning digital cinema or even a single work of digital cinema made by 2002, describe and discuss the cinematic context in which digital cinema emerged, and they borrow from its experiences. Thus, we used some of these in our research. In fact, the “questioning of what the camera reveals and fuzzy boundaries between ‘reality’ and fiction”, which Tapper believes could be “prominent features of much recent Iranian cinema” (Tapper, 2002a, p.14), are still the main concern for Iranian digital cinema and its masters, and we will discuss this later.

In his article in the book, Naficy suggests that revolution aided the development of new cinema in Iran, as it has its own financial structure and ideology although it partially releases itself from the dominant ideology. Although the authorities do not like cinema vérité, directors tried to achieve reality by filming the making of film - as in *Salaam Cinema* (1995) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf and *Close Up* (1990) and even *Taste of Cherry* (1997) by Kiarostami - and “by using documentary conventions and cinematic styles, minimal scripting, real people (not actors) and real locations” (Tapper, 2002a, p. 15). Tapper mentions this effort to capture reality as poetical reality and we can call it *indirect*. Location is one of the issues we discuss later and we will show the ability of the digital camera to create its own genre on the foundations of its predecessors, in this case Iranian neorealism.

Another inspiring issue for us among the subjects of this book is the restriction of the Iranian context and its pros and cons. Tapper believes that, despite Kiarostami’s claim that he is not affected by restriction, restrictions have had benefits for Iranian cinema, and Kiarostami himself admits that restriction increased creativity. This was the case even indirectly, as Makhmalbaf believes that Iranian censorship banning the exhibition of Hollywood products has helped Iranian film-makers to find their audience (Tapper, 2002a). Indeed, this same

factor (restriction) encouraged some masters of Iranian cinema such as Panahi to cross the border (between analogue and digital) and make his first digital film, *Offside*, in 2006.

Finally, I should mention Mulvey's notion that Kiarostami is beyond Iranian neorealist cinema or what she called the "new wave". Of course, Kiarostami has played a major role in 'defining aesthetic formal characteristics' of new Iranian cinema but Mulvey believes that, "In particular, Kiarostami explores the narrow line between illusion and reality that is the defining characteristic of the cinema" (Tapper, 2002b, p.260). In fact, Kiarostami is concerned about the ability of cinema to capture the actual image or transcend it, and his chosen approach influences his audience as well and makes them think about "possibilities of cinematic representation"; raising this form of questioning and uncertainty may conflict with the dominant ideology. Mulvey believes that "Kiarostami's films are themselves actually built on an aesthetic of uncertainty and curiosity, [and] this approach is simultaneously socially desirable and cinematically necessary" (Tapper, 2002b, p.260). As Kiarostami claimed in his interviews (particularly on *10 on Ten*), and as Mulvey states, the cinema of Kiarostami does not want to fascinate the audience. He just wants to decipher the truth for them (Tapper, 2002b).

As I will investigate location in digital filmmaking in Iran as one of the characteristics of digital Iranian cinema and have mentioned Saeed-Vafa's idea about location in new Iranian cinema, it is useful to refer to Madanipour's article about location in Iranian cinema. Madanipour (2012), in his article entitled 'Representation of Space in Contemporary Iranian Cinema', points out some special features of location in Iranian cinema. He explains that the space of a house and city is a window that opens on to the private and public aspects of the citizen's life, and Iranian film-makers use these spaces in different ways. Sometimes location acts merely as a container and neutral background to the story, but on other occasions it is an important element of the story. He also believes that space sometimes has a leading role in the narrative and helps shape the characters. Although his main focus is on Iranian pre-digital cinema, he mentions *Ten* as the continuation of Kiarostami's works and his attitude to location. He believes that the city acts as a background to the main stage in *Ten*, and the inside of the car is just a moving stage; *Ten* is thus completely



different from films such as *The Circle*. He believes that the journey in Kiarostami's film plays the main role, and the car that transports the characters is important in this regard. The journey in *Ten* takes place in the city while that in *Taste of Cherry* occurs in the suburbs. The dusty view of Tehran from the hills next to the city helps Kiarostami to deliver his message about depression.

Madanipour (2012) points to the changing locations from rural areas to urban areas in the work of Iranian film-makers such as Kiarostami. He believes that concentrating on rural people and people in small cities gives the film-maker the opportunity to investigate a common background, comprehending the complex city life and also free expression. Although the author's main concern is about location, he acknowledges the efforts of the director of *Taste of Cherry* to prepare a discussion between the main character from Tehran and others from the rural area in order to investigate the depression of the main character. Madanipour (2012) appreciates the efforts of some Iranian film-makers to represent the profound aspects of human emotion by using location and without playing with the audience's emotions via story and dialogue. Moreover, journeys in rural area and cities, which are characteristic of some film-makers such as Kiarostami and Ghobadi (we will discuss their works in the coming chapters) connect scenes, characters and stories and show the audience places beyond their experience in everyday life, giving them a moment to search for originality. Madanipour (2012) also explains some limitations and boundaries to realistic cinema in Iranian films related to *Sharia* (Islamic Law). These laws limit the representation of interiors of houses and relationships between couples; thus, most famous and international Iranian directors prefer outdoor locations. Nevertheless, some Iranian films choose homes as their main locations. Madanipour (2012) tries to divide houses into private parts and guest rooms to show how Iranian filmmakers take advantage of interiors without crossing cultural red lines.

### *The Special Case of Kiarostami and Iranian Digital Cinema*

Mulvey reviewed her ideas about Kiarostami after encountering his digital films, particularly *Ten* (2002). A few years later, Mulvey claims that "Kiarostami's cinema is marked by ability to change that affects both the form and the content of his films" (Mulvey, 2007, p.19). She identifies *Ten* as the turning point in

Kiarostami's film-making, not only because he chooses a woman as the main character of his film but also because he radically changes his style thanks to light digital cameras. She also briefly points out some similarities between *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten* and mentions the intimacy made possible by digital cameras in this film, focusing on the interaction between actors in a car rather than representing landscape.

In addition, Laura Mulvey (2007), in her article 'Reputation and Return', points out some similarities between *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*. Although this article is mainly about the pre-digital works of Kiarostami (in particular the Koker trilogy), at the end she emphasises the difference between Kiarostami's digital and pre-digital oeuvres.

Returning to our review of Iranian cinema and digital films in recent literature, we should concede that Hamid Naficy has played a big role in introducing and discussing Iranian cinema, particularly in his four-volume book, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*. He mentions digital films in several parts of his book. Unlike others, Naficy (2012) does not try to extract any strange ideas about women or feminism in *Ten*, because he admits that Kiarostami's films "are so intricately and intimately tied to his own existence and subjectivity that it is difficult to conceive of his life without his films and of his films without him" (Naficy, 2012, p.183). But he does not overlook certain aspects of Kiarostami's digital works that interact with the social context of Iran and the issue of women. Thus, he notes the unveiled girls in front of the camera and also points to Kiarostami's other digital films. He states that Kiarostami, "In *Ten* (Dah 2002), not only used female characters with the loose hijab but also without a hijab (with head shaved), and still later defied the prohibition on direct gazes in his film *Shirin* (2008) by forcing the spectator to watch for 92 minutes close-up images of the faces of 140 beautiful Iranian actresses" (Naficy, 2012, p.134). These changes in Kiarostami's main actors suggested that digital cameras were acting as new apparatus for representing women as well as crossing some red lines. Naficy (2012), of course, points out some criticisms of Kiarostami's work before *Ten*, in that male characters were always in prominent positions. Adopting that point of view, in most of Kiarostami's films made by digital camera, female characters have had the main roles, such as *Certified Copy* (2010) and *Like Someone in Love* (2012).

In his book *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Naficy (2012) although not mentioning digital film-making in a separate section, mentions some aspects of digital films based on their subjects, social effects and contexts. For instance, he mentioned *Offside* (2006) as a film that represents teenage women and their problems in a different way from that offered by other directors at that time. However, his discussion on the distribution of *No One Knows about Persian Cats* by Bahman Ghobadi is partially relevant to this research. He states: "Bahman Ghobadi's decision in 2010 to make his banned films available to Iranians on DVD, free of charge, might open up another dimension in the evolution of Iranian underground cinema, nationally and transnationally" (Naficy, 2012, p.68). We interpret this event as a turning point in the history of digital cinema in Iran in terms of the digital distribution of digital independent cinema, which I discuss in the second chapter.

Apart from what I mentioned about digital cinema, Naficy's scholarly research, his articles and books are among my sources for researching digital cinema. In particular, his ideas about neorealism and art house cinema in Iran and the works of Kiarostami have given me a clearer view of the context in which digital cinema emerged and developed in Iran. This also helps me to choose case-studies from among post-revolutionary Iranian cinema for comparison with new digital cinema in Iran, especially in the case of self-reflexivity in most of the work of Kiarostami, in particular in *Taste of Cherry*, which I compare with Kiarostami's digital cinema style. Furthermore, his investigation and notion of the provocation of actors and improvisation, which Kiarostami used in his pre-digital films, helps my research in the field of digital cinema in the Iranian pre-digital cinematic context.

In this part, I should examine some notes from Christopher Gow's (2011) book, *From Iran to Hollywood and Some Places In-between: Reframing Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema*, which are relevant to my research. First, he is among those researchers who noticed the impact of digital distribution by VCD (Video Compact Disc) on Iranian cinema, as is mentioned in the second chapter. He also emphasised Kiarostami's ideas on reality and cinematic reality based on Mulvey's discussion of reality in Kiarostami's work. He adds: "Defying easy categorization or clear-cut definitions, many of Kiarostami's films present a disorienting blend of reality and fiction, intimating the existence of other realities

beyond the frame of the camera” (Gow, 2011, p.21). More importantly, his awareness of the change in style in Kiarostami’s recent films, a trend he traced to his pre-digital films, is notable although he does not mention digital cinema and digital cameras in this regard. He explains: “Kiarostami’s desire to diminish his own ‘presence’ within the films he makes is displayed most starkly in his more recent cinematic offerings such as *10* (2002) and *Five* (2005), both of which, composed as they are of several series of extremely lengthy static shots, seemingly reduce the degree of directorial control to an absolute minimum” (Gow, 2011, p.26). Gow tries to explain these changes with reference to the auteur theory and the director’s previous work such as the Koker trilogy and does not emphasise approach to reality. However in the third chapter of this research I adopt the notion that Kiarostami offers for this kind of film-making, diminishing the role of director. I think Kiarostami himself has the better explanation for his move towards this new style of film-making but I should mention the alternative explanation of his move, here, in the literature review.

### *Poetical Approach to Abbas Kiarostami’s Digital Films*

As I investigate Abbas Kiarostami’s work before and after the digital era, I should mention and investigate the alternative approaches to his works, especially, the films I will use as case studies in my research.

The influence of Persian poetry has been noted by scholars who discuss new Iranian cinema, and we mentioned it in reference to Dabashi’s *Close Up* (2001) and *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (2007). Khatereh Sheibani is one of those scholars who focused on Persian poetry and new Iranian cinema, particularly Kiarostami’s pre-digital works including *Taste of Cherry*. She also mentioned *Ten* once in her book. She claims in her article “Kiarostami is a Poet/Philosopher who writes his poetic films with camera. (Sheibani, 2007, p.509) She focuses on the influence of Forough Farukhzad and Sohrab Sepehri, two modern Persian poets, on the works of Kiarostami, and she also mentions the traditional form of Persian poetry, *ghazal*, in Kiarostami’s films in her book entitled *Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution*, published in 2011. Although my research does not explore this aspect of Iranian cinema and I have some serious reservations about her way of looking at some works of Iranian neorealism, I found some useful points in

her work, especially when she discusses *Taste of Cherry*, which I analyse in the third chapter of this thesis. First, Sheibani tries to show that the intimacy and simplicity of the realism applied by Kiarostami is similar to what the modern Iranian poets achieve in their works. She explains: "In Kiarostami's films, Sepehri and Farokhzad's intimate language has turned into a unique visual display in which the viewer feels him/herself from the past and future in order to grasp the wonderful immediate moment" (Sheibani, 2007, p.511). Mentioning Sepehri's notion of 'cleaning eyes for watching the world differently' she claims that "Kiarostami's camera functions as revealing fresh eyes clear and cleaned enough to grasp the reality that the audiences' eyes failed to see before" (Sheibani, 2007, p.512). She also points out some aspects of Kiarostami's work that remind me of Mulvey's notion of uncertainty. Sheibani says: "Kiarostami's aesthetically motivated realism offers a reading and in some cases several readings of reality and does not intend to suggest an absolute, unchanging, and unchangeable whole." (Sheibani, 2007, p.512) She mentions some characteristics of his work such as avoiding classical cuts and using depth of focus, emphasising the role of depth of focus in offering uncertainty. She believes his realism "produces multiple realisms. This multiplicity of possibilities liberates his film from having fixed meaning by providing space to its spectators to draw their conclusions" (Sheibani, 2007, p.512).

When Sheibani tries to investigate the poetical points in Kiarostami's works, she recognises something that Kiarostami explained in his digital work later. Sheibani claims that, "In any event, the presence and the deliberate elimination of the director in Kiarostami's films announce the very existence of an auteur who wishes to criticize or eliminate himself. This shows another striking resemblance to the poetry of Sepehri and Farokhzad". (Sheibani, 2007, p.512) Nevertheless, Kiarostami in *10 on Ten* claims that this is a way of approaching reality. In fact, Sheibani tries to interpret every characteristic of Kiarostami's works as an approach to poetical film-making, even including the form of his script. She claims that "The Symbolic and in some cases allegorical construction of modern Persian poetry is achieved in Kiarostami's film by employing minimal plots and on-narrative stories, based on lyrical moments set in rural areas that become a means of deploying a poetic realism" (Sheibani, 2007, p.531). This kind of approach to Kiarostami's script and the drawing of

analogies between film and literature might be an alternative approach to Kiarostami's work although in my research I prefer to use the approach that is more suitable for visual arts.

Investigating the *mise-en-scene* of Kiarostami's pre-digital works, Sheibani tries to find some relation between the use of windows in the work of modern poets and that of Kiarostami. She even includes lighting in this comparison when she talks about the lighting of the grave in *Taste of Cherry*. Thus, she sometimes finds and interprets things that are the complete opposite of what we see in the film. For example, she believes that "Badii in *Taste of Cherry* is so isolated that he drives on the road to find somebody to share his thoughts with" (Sheibani, 2007, p.534), although he is clearly refusing to share his thoughts and is simply asking the people he meets to work for him, as I will explain in the relevant chapter. It seems as though Sheibani would like to interpret everything poetically, and in this regard she sometimes ignores certain aspects of Kiarostami's films. Of Kiarostami's digital films, she briefly claims: "Kiarostami is that philosopher of today, already using his digital camera, who borrows Persian poetic conceptions to propose his philosophy of life through a cinematic language that is an equivalent to poetic language" (Sheibani, 2007, p.534). Of course, she uses Astruc's *Camera Stylo*<sup>2</sup> idea to consider Kiarostami a poet or author, which makes this more believable as Kiarostami himself points out that concept in a different way in his educational documentary *10 on Ten*.

Sheibani discusses *Ten* in more detail in her book in 2011, but she tends to overestimate the weight of poetry in Kiarostami's film. She explains a kind of traditional Persian poetry called *ghazal* and then claims: "the *ghazal* as a whole is a harmonious unit. Kiarostami's film-making is similar in style. Each scene or image is a self-contained unit. At the same time, each film, as a collection of images, is a congruent whole, as we saw in *Life and then Nothing*. This is taken further in *Dah* (*Ten*, 2002), with its ten independent and at the same time interrelated parts" (Sheibani, 2011, p.42). She then claims: "This approach to film-making as a poetic form inspired by Persian *ghazal* is what makes Kiarostami unique" (Sheibani, 2011, p.42). In fact, in this research I completely

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<sup>2</sup> Camera-stylo (camera-pen) is Alexander Astruc's notion about new French cinema that he explains in his article "The Birth of a New Avant-Carde: La Camera-Stylo from The New Wave". He believes "Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The film-maker author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc, 1948, p.161).

avoid this kind of approach to Kiarostami's digital work as he clearly explains his approach to digital film-making. Thus, any attempt to make poetical interpretations would be absurd in my approach to Iranian digital cinema. Of course, some of her conclusions about *Ten* are interesting although I do not follow her method of interpretation. She found a similarity between *Ten* and *ghazal* and claims: "Kiarostami's films lend towards simultaneity over sequentiality" (Sheibani, 2011, p.42). However, I think she misunderstands Kiarostami's attitude to digital film-making to some extent. She thinks he happens upon the film like a poet, whereas incidents happen in the real world and Kiarostami captures the real world and makes the film by process of elimination. At most, she would claim that the structure of Persian *ghazal* unconsciously inspired Kiarostami in shaping his film beside other factors and his will. In my research I prefer to rely on more objective evidence and the filmmaker's claim.

In fact, we can accept a poetical approach to Kiarostami's pre-digital works as a kind of attitude to his work. But we cannot accept the kind of symbolism that the researcher seeks in every part of Kiarostami's films. For example, in *Taste of Cherry* Sheibani looks for the ruin that Kiarostami represented in *Through the Olive Trees* and identifies it as the ruins in Iranian poetry, surprisingly translating the Persian word *Kharabat* as ruins when it was in fact the name of a kind of pothouse in Iranian Islamic culture (Dehkhoda, 1993). She also sees the main discussion of film as a historical discussion of two different mystical schools of thought, which is different from Kiarostami's overall view and his approach to film-making. I believe in the poetic aspects of Iranian neorealism, in particular Kiarostami's work, but I prefer the notion of Raul Ruiz to the comparison of films with Persian poetry. Ruiz believes that "The rules you need to understand these poetic objects are unique to each film and must be rediscovered by every viewer" (Ruiz, 1995, p.75). He goes deeper than the surface and technical issues of cinema and tries to reveal the capability of cinema to express feelings like a poet: "These feelings approximate emotions such as fear, vertigo, anger and adoration. In fact, they are closer to mysticism than to a philosophy of art" (Ruiz, 2007, p.10). On the other hand, he thinks cinema deserves a poetic approach not only for its power and technique but also for its strangeness. We can adopt various techniques to analyse and

understand the films, “yet something will always escape analysis. The 'dark region'” (Ruiz, 2007, p.10). In fact, in this thesis we will not investigate that region, which may be full of mystery and poetical ideas, but we should admire this aspect and recognise it.

We can address this aspect of cinema in another way; Ruiz believes that “Each intellectual discipline has its own rules and restrictions, and on the basis of these one can metaphorically build paths leading to the apprehension of phenomena that try to escape us, cinema, for instance” (Ruiz, 2007, p.107). He believes in the use of metaphor in poetic films but his approach is much deeper. To some extent he considers film as a kind of dream, and by using that metaphor he believes in a kind of interaction between film and viewer. He respects both *mise-en-scene* and montage and believes in “a cinema capable of inventing a new grammar each time it goes from one world to the next, capable of producing a unique emotion before everything, every animal, every plant, simply by modifying the parameters of space and time. But this implies a constant practice of both attention and detachment, an ability to enter into the act of filming and return an instant afterward to passive contemplation. In short, a cinema capable of accounting, above all, for the varieties of experience in the sensible world” (Ruiz, 1995, p.90).

Returning to Sheibani's poetical ideas about *Taste of Cherry*, she notices a difference between this work and the author's previous films as, “In his previous films, Kiarostami was always focusing on 'ideas' rather than on questions that concern 'humankind'. In *Taste of Cherry*, he highlights the plight of modern human beings”. (Sheibani, 2007, p.55) This seems reasonable but this fact does not necessarily put *Taste of Cherry* in the different category of Kiarostami's pre-digital films. In fact Kiarostami did not change his style in *Taste of Cherry*. It seems that characters move from isolated rural areas to city suburbs that are not so isolated, although Sheibani believes that Badii isolates himself through his thoughts. I also accept that, in “*Taste of Cherry*, the language does not signify a specific time. This film does not explore concrete reality in the outside world, or set out to portray a 'story' about a man who wants to commit suicide. On the contrary, this man, Badii, represents a universal story of human beings and how they challenge and question concepts such as life and death” (Sheibani, 2007, p.42). Nevertheless, as she also notices in



Kiarostami's work and as Ruiz (2007) believes about poetical films, we should seek a meaning in every shot or sequence as well, "Because Kiarostami's films develop meaning simultaneously through space, and not through time in a conventional linear fashion, their 'unity' cannot be grasped unless the audience watches them in a spatial manner" (Sheibani, 2007, p.47). However, we can find a general meaning that has cast its shadow over the whole film, and Sheibani notices this: "*Taste of Cherry* is an artistic interpretation of life that is outside the religious boundaries of Iranian society. Kiarostami's humanism elevates man above culture" (Sheibani, 2007, p.50). However, we do not intend to make this kind of political interpretation of the film. In order to achieve a comprehensive review, I should briefly mention some literature that investigates Iranian cinema by focusing on different subjects, although they address digital films and digital technology in a different way.

### *Political Approaches to Iranian Digital Cinema*

Hamid Reza Sadr, in his book *Iranian Cinema Political History* (2006), adopts a particular approach to Iranian cinema and consequently ignores some parts of Iranian cinema which we focus on in this research. In his view, Iranian films are suitable media for political ideas and social values in Iran. In this regard, he does not ignore Iranian mainstream film, as some scholars do. He believes that, "With very few exceptions, mainstream Iranian film is uninteresting to anyone looking for imaginative expression. However, to those curious about the ways in which Iranian culture is or is not represented in films, it remains engaging" (Sadr, 2006, p.2).

However, in the last chapter of his book, he surveys new Iranian cinema (which I call Iranian neorealism) which he assumes has been disregarded as a part of Iranian cinema. He says that "the object of this book is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Iranian film and to challenge the marginalisation of political issues within it, exposing some of the prevalent conceptions about the role and place of politics in mainstream Iranian cinema" (Sadr, 2007, p.3). Thus, he investigates certain parts of it according to the political issues that the particular chapter is about. For example, he mentions *Barefoot to Harat* (2002), which can be considered a digital film made by Majid Majidi in Afghanistan. In fact, *Barefoot to Harat* was filmed by video Beta-cam during two trips to

Afghanistan but was converted to digital from analogue video; this was one of the first experiences for some Iranian technicians and Majidi of digital editing and sound design. The importance of the film for Sadr is its political dimension. He also refers to some of the Makhmalbaf family's films such as *Joy of Madness* (2003) by Hanna Makhmalbaf, which is a digital film and "a documentary following the trials her sister Samira endured whilst preparing to shoot *Five in the Afternoon*; [it] was about the climate of fear in Afghanistan and revealed the long shadow of the Taliban over women in the country, who were frightened to appear in front of the camera" (Sadr, 2006, p.276). In fact, Sadr's final chapter, which was meant to discuss Iranian cinema from 2000-2005, focuses only on the major political issues to the west and east of Iran. Afghanistan and Kurdistan are Sadr's main concerns and he barely mentions any digital films made during this period, apart from what we have discussed above. Although the political issues, particularly regarding analogue film, are not the concern of this research, I ought to mention Sadr's ideas about Kiarostami's last analogue film in a political context, as it may help us to understand the situation of directors who were moving to digital from analogue. He explains: "The last half of the 1990s was a feverish time, a period in which paranoia became the norm. Kiarostami's films had always been considered non-political, though concerned with themes of life and death, but in this period a paranoid tone crept in. With *Taste of Cherry* and *Bad Ma ra Khahad Bord* (*The Wind Will Carry Us*, 1999), the theme of death and the intellectual was further developed" (Sadr, 2006, p.255). This kind of paranoia and political restriction could be one of the factors that pushed independent directors towards digital cinema, and we will discuss this later in the relevant chapter.

Shahab Esfandiari also takes a political approach to Iranian cinema in his book *Iranian Cinema and Globalization National, Transnational and Islamic Dimensions*. He does not investigate or discuss digital work or the works of internationally recognised directors such as Kiarostami. He claims: "for two reasons this study cannot be confined in its case studies to the 'transnational' dimension of Iranian cinema: firstly, 'transnational' films and film-makers constitute a relatively small fraction of Iranian 'national cinema' and do not represent it as a whole. Secondly, the profound and complex processes of globalization, as it shall be argued, have implications that go far beyond the

domains of ‘transnational cinema’” (Esfandiari, 2012, p.8). Thus most of his case-studies are about non-internationally recognised film-makers, apart from Makhmalbaf; Esfandiari analyses some of his 35mm films. Moreover, his interview with Kiarostami on national cinema does not discover anything relevant to our field in this regard. However, his discussion of issues such as the role of the absence of Hollywood in the flourishing of new Iranian cinema, particularly between 1980 and 2000 (just before the emergence of digital cinema) and his tracing of the impact of digital media such as DVDs on this development are interesting. He states: “The government could restrict the screening of foreign films in cinema theatres, but controlling the growing market for video – and later VCDs and DVDs – was a much more difficult task” (Esfandiari, 2012, p.182). He also explains that, “In order to fight the black market, the government decided to lift the ban on video cassette players in the early 1990s” (Esfandiari, 2012, p.182).

As Esfandiari was one of Iran’s cultural managers, his approach of focusing on the role of government is predictable. However, we should appreciate and use his point about the emergence of the DVD and its influence on Iranian cinema. He states: “Faced by the challenge of large flat screens in homes and high quality DVDs of the latest Hollywood blockbusters, the Iranian film industry became even more dependent on government subsidies and guaranteed loans in order to survive. By 2002, the annual admissions had dropped to a record low of 17 million; that is approximately 20 per cent of the figure in 1990” (Esfandiari, 2012, p.183). In the shadow of these claims, the ideas of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf on digital cinema – explained in this thesis – are more understandable when they talk about freedom from capital and government. We will discuss digital distribution and the role of the black market and will show the changes that occurred in digital distribution, even for mainstream films, in the second chapter, but our approach is more technical than political.

Zeydabadi-Nejad (2010) is among those scholars who adopt a political approach to Iranian cinema. In fact he looks at cinema in Iran as ‘social/ political institution’ and in his book, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema Film and Society in Islamic Republic*, he “has shown some of the complexities of film reception in Iran and has contextualized the phenomenon in Iranian society at large.” (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010: p 161) Although his approach to Iranian cinema does

not relate to our research, his study of one of my case-studies (*Ten* by Kiarostami) is of relevance to this research. In addition, his attitude to internationally recognised film-makers and transnational films is different from that of Esfandiari. He also believes that video tapes or updated versions (DVDs) help these film-makers to reach their audience. Of those film-makers who choose social or political subjects, he explains that, “although such films are often banned, the existence of the bootleg video economy has meant that the films are still viewed by Iranian audiences. This economy remains largely unchallenged by the authorities inside the country and invisible from the perspective of those observing from the outside”. (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p.161) It seems that the distribution of digital media and video helped independent film-makers in Iran before the introduction of the digital camera.

### *Issues of Women and Gender in Iranian Digital Cinema*

Zeydabadi-Nejad chose to study *Ten* as it is concerned with women and gender issues. He claimed to Kiarostami that he was only focusing on “his fascination with the new possibilities available to filmmakers with the use of DV cameras” (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p.128) in his talk after the film had been shown in London. Thus, as we discuss in this research, women’s problems were not the major concern for him, despite Jafar Panahi and his films *Offside* and *The Circle*. This makes a comparison of *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten* more suitable, as we discuss in the third chapter. He mentioned that Kiarostami believes that “the representation of women in Iranian cinema so far had not been realistic, because female characters in the films are limited to devoted mothers, scheming seductresses, or women who are unrealistically strong” (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p.128). In fact, Kiarostami believes he has achieved a true representation of a woman in *Ten*, and we will discuss how this was done in the third chapter. Interestingly, however, Zeydabadi-Nejad, who met the real character (Mania), emphasised that, “In real life, Mania is no different from her persona in *10*. She is divorced from Amin’s father and like in the film she is a painter”, as we see in film (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p.135). Fortunately, Zeydabadi-Nejad interviewed Mania, the main character in *Ten*, about the representation of her character. She claims: “What you see on the screen is what was in my subconscious, and it flowed out of me. I cannot see the Mania on the screen as separate from myself. In fact, the film is 80 per cent true to my

life". (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2010, p.135) Thus, what we see in the film concerning women's issues is part of Mania's own character and ideas, and Kiarostami represented them faithfully through his digital film-making skills, as we will explain in the third chapter.

Negar Mottahedeh (2008) is another scholar who looks at *Ten* according to women's issues but her investigation is very brief compared to her analysis of Kiarostami's other films in her book *Displaced Allegories, post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema*. She interprets Kiarostami's method of digital film-making partially based on her interest in women's issues. She claims: "Kiarostami's obvious absence from the set in a film, [which] he has coined the 'non-made film', point up the impossibilities of hetero-social interaction between female actors and their male director. Women have been taken off the screen in the era of post-revolutionary modesty. Thus, to show women as central characters, in this logic, means absenting the male director altogether" (Mottahedeh, 2008, p.138).

### *Theories and Discussions on the Digital Works of Kiarostami*

As Iranian digital cinema and its development is bound up with Kiarostami and his works, I should look more closely at books and articles written specifically about him to find out more about his digital work. Although Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaun's book about Abbas Kiarostami was written in 2003, they acknowledged the importance of Kiarostami's existing digital works such as *ABC Africa* and *Ten*. In particular, Saeed-Vafa asked Kiarostami about *ABC Africa* in her interview. Also, some information about and analysis of *Taste of Cherry*, which we chose from among Kiarostami's pre-digital films, is quite useful. In particular, Rosenbaun's ideas about Kiarostami's films, which are similar to those of scholars such as Naficy, are based on factual observations and the study of documents and help us to look at Kiarostami's *oeuvre*. Of Kiarostami's references to cinema, he believes that, "he makes these references not out of any love for his medium but because of his own experience, which is that of a filmmaker" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.29). In addition, his discussion of Kiarostami's method of directing actors in *Taste of Cherry* helps us to compare *Taste of Cherry* with *Ten* to some extent.

He explains how Kiarostami filmed each actor separately in 'an angle/ and reverse-angle pattern' and they acted in front of him instead of another actor. "In The case of *Taste of Cherry*, one clear if subliminal effect of working with each actor in isolation is to create a powerful sense of solitude that is felt throughout the film prior to the exhilarating camaraderie of the epilogue, regardless of whether Badii is alone or with someone else" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.31). Appreciating this point, in the third chapter we investigate the directing of actors in this film more deeply and in more detail.

With regard to Abbas Kiarostami's first digital film, *ABC Africa*, Rosenbaun made some interesting discoveries in an interview with Kiarostami that highlight the difficulty of the first attempt at digital film-making in Iran. For instance, he had problems with fast pans - as was usual with the first generation of digital video cameras - as well as with white and bright colours. But he also found advantages in these new devices at an early stage, explaining them both to Rosenbaun and in his interview with me that we used in this research.

Although the book by Rosenbaun and Saeed-Vafa was published before the making of *10 on Ten* by Kiarostami, they recognised and discussed some important points about *Ten*, particularly in their discussion in the third chapter of the book. Rosenbaun believes that Kiarostami, by making *Ten*, intended to tell us more about life in contemporary Tehran than in any previous film (except *Report* (1977)). He used a metaphor to describe his new device for this film. He says that Kiarostami put his precious message "in a bottle and sent it out into the world. And the bottle in this case is the DV [digital video] camera" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.99). This metaphor reminds us of the freedom offered by digital cameras and the smuggling of *This Is Not a Film* (2012) in a piece of cake to the Cannes Film Festival, which is explained in the second chapter. Furthermore Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun (2003) recognised Kiarostami's efforts to reduce the direction. Saeed-Vafa (2003) acknowledged the immediacy and intimacy of digital video in the making of *Ten*. She also pointed out the power of the 'surveillance' camera, which is close to the term 'omnipresence', which Kiarostami used to describe digital cameras. Rosenbaun (2003) also recognised the absence of reverse angles which other researchers and critics explained in detail based on Kiarostami's explanation in his interviews.

Alberto Elena, gathering some ideas for his book, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* (2005), to shape an attitude to this film-maker, fortunately took into account his important digital works such as *ABC Africa*, *Ten* and even *Five*, as well as his pre-digital work. Elena mentioned Kiarostami's claim about *ABC Africa* and digital cameras: "I like to work with this much smaller camera, which is more intimate and more immediate" (Elena, 2005, p.174); he then predicted that we will face an explosion in interest in film-making because of digital cameras.

Elena, like other researchers and critics, notes that, "following the cautious experiment of *ABC Africa*, *Ten* would exploit the potential of digital video to the utmost, reducing the interference of the film-making process to an absolute minimum and dispensing almost completely with a film crew in the usual sense of the term" (Elena, 2005, p. 174). He also mentions Kiarostami's famous metaphor about his role in these kinds of movie as being like a coach at a football match to explain the reduced role of the director in *Ten*, claiming that "*Ten* is without any doubt whatsoever one of the bravest film projects of recent years" (Elena, 2005, p.175). He considers *Five* as a continuation of the trend of Kiarostami's intention to reduce direction, summarizing his work thus: "Kiarostami recounts a story told by Milan Kundera, about how his father's vocabulary diminished with age until he was left with only two words, which summed up his life's experience and his perception of reality: 'How strange!' The anecdote is very relevant, because Kiarostami uses it to help to sum up his conception of *Ten*: 'This film is my own 'two words'. It sums up almost everything". (Elena, 2005, p.179) Thus, Kiarostami summarises everything and reduces the role of directing to the extent that Alain Bergala in *Cahiers du Cinema* claims Kiarostami did in *Five*, "with absolute freedom, alone, removed from any kind of production restraints, with a DV camera and equal amounts of care and patience" (Bergala, 2004, pp.44-45). Thus, as Elena (2005) believes (based on Kiarostami's claim), this film was made with the help of poetry and photography and by freedom from narrative rules.

Among the sources that tell us about Kiarostami's ideas on digital film-making, the reports from his workshop are quite useful because they demonstrate how Iranian digital cinema really works. Mahmoud Reza Sani (2012), in his book *Men at Work: Cinematic Lessons from Abbas Kiarostami*, reports and explains

one of Kiarostami's most successful workshops in Spain in 2012. I also looked at the Persian version (Kiarostami's original notes), and as I attended one of Kiarostami's first workshops in Iran in 2004, I picked up some important points in this new book about Kiarostami's works. This book details some of the master's beliefs in his real life and works without being overwhelmed by theorists and media influence. For example, while scholars or researchers discuss the controversial debate about whether he believes in restriction for art to flourish, we see that he restricts his students in order to make more artistic films, explaining thus: "when we stay in an environment and restrict ourselves for working somewhere, so stories approach us. It looks like a prisoner who becomes a sculptor using bread dough because he knows he should stay in prison without pencil, paper or anything." (Sani, 2012, p.11) Of course, I am aware of the point these kinds of workshops are making 10 years after the making of *Ten*; this shows what is timeless for the master and what changes over time. Moreover, Kiarostami's own explanations of some aspects of his previous work are more trustworthy than interpretations, as is my approach in this research.

L.A. Bluke (2011), in an MA dissertation entitled *Contemporary Neorealist Principles in Abbas Kiarostami's Filmmaking (1997 – 2005)*, analysed several of Kiarostami's works, including his digital works *Ten* and *Five*, and tries to compare Kiarostami's style with the work of Italian neorealists. However he only investigates Kiarostami's works up to 2005 because "post-2005 Kiarostami moved away from a naturalistic, *vérité* style of filmmaking. With *Tickets* (2005) we begin to see Kiarostami's change of direction, in terms of film content and style". (Bluke, 2011, p.9) He did not choose the Koker trilogy, Kiarostami's most famous works, and instead selects *Taste of Cherry* (1997), *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), *ABC Africa* (2001), *Ten* (2002), *10 on Ten* (2003), *Five* (2003), and *Tickets* (2005) for close analysis. He analyses them very briefly in terms of mise-en-scene in order to find the neorealist elements in them and consequently cannot find any significant changes between the digital and pre-digital work of Kiarostami. He even believes that the style that Kiarostami explains in *Ten on 10* can be traced back to all Kiarostami's work. In fact, he counts the digital camera as just one of many factors in Kiarostami's films, such as using children, landscape, narrative and so on. He tries to take an overall



look at Kiarostami's work regardless of whether it is pre-digital or digital. He explains his attitude thus: "Contemporary social issues of finding work, 'being on the road, grinding poverty, lack of money, lack of institutionalised help, and the absence of important resources are quickly established. These themes along with the cultural domination in Iran are discussed in Kiarostami's films, and are evident from the very first shots of films such as *Taste of Cherry*, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, *ABC Africa* and *Ten* (Bluke, 2011, p.65). Nevertheless, in the conclusion of his work he puts *Ten* in a higher position and claims that "Kiarostami has evolved many aspects of Neorealism in his work with *Ten*, this film being exemplary of his auteurist take on the stylistic movement (Bluke, 2011, p.76). Yet, it seems that, by ignoring the previous work of Kiarostami, he has not fully comprehended Kiarostami's reflexive style in his pre-digital work and his reduction of the director's role in his digital films, and he merely tries to prove the resemblance of Kiarostami to Italian Neorealism.

It seems that 2005 was the year when the digital cinema of Abbas Kiarostami was recognised by critics and researchers, and it may have prompted Geoff Andrew to prepare something comprehensive about *Ten* as the masterpiece of Kiarostami's digital work. He states: "Kiarostami is seeking new ways to make us see and hear, feel and think. All we need do is open our eyes and ears, hearts and minds". (Andrew, 2005, p.10) With this attitude, he looks at *Ten* as the turning point in Kiarostami's *oeuvre*. He also accepts Kiarostami's claims that making *Ten* without a digital camera would have been impossible. Returning to the pre-digital work of Kiarostami, Andrew believes there are some similarities between *Taste of Cherry* and *Close Up* as we mentioned with reference to Kiarostami's interview. He explains: "*The Taste of Cherry* made more audacious use of repetition and ellipsis than any Kiarostami film since *Close Up*" (Andrew, 2005, p.29). He also considers *ABC Africa* to be a film that foreshadows *Ten*, in that he sensed a kind of trend from the pre-digital to the digital work of Kiarostami. Thus he argues about the making of *Five*: "as we've seen, *10* is organically linked to all the director's earlier work. It also constitutes a turning-point in that the discovery of digital encouraged him to use even more minimalist methods than before (Andrew, 2005, p.73). However, by supporting Kiarostami's ideas in his interview and from other evidence, I will criticise part of this assumption, in particular about the pre-digital work of Kiarostami. But about

*Five* I should concede this relationship, as Kiarostami himself claims: “*10* showed me that if people are involved with a character or subject, they don't need the other stuff, so it gave me the confidence to make *Five*” (Andrew, 2005, p.29).

Andrew's idea about narrative is considerable. He breaks down narrative into ten blocks that interact with one another to some extent and he also recognizes a climax in the ninth chapter although he claims that it is not a conventional dramatic climax. He also explains the ending of the narrative thus: Mania “has been on a journey, and through her experiences has found for herself a level of calm perfectly expressed by the closing music” (Andrew, 2005, p.43). His idea about ten blocks is close to other scholars such as Munt (2006) and it is congruous with the structure of the film as it contains 10 chapters.

When Andrew (2005) investigates the actors and their real characters, he points out a very important issue concerning realism in Kiarostami's digital work which we consider in our research. He said: “it is appropriate, then, to consider whether the passengers in *10* are mere ciphers illustrating different aspects of female experience, or are sufficiently well drawn to convince us they exist as proper individuals” (Andrew, 2005, p.47). He mentions the importance of choosing actors in Kiarostami's method of filmmaking and explains this in the case of *Ten* with some examples, emphasising the thoughts of most scholars about Kiarostami's film: “Kiarostami's methods keep the characterisations firmly within the realm of plausibility. That is partly a matter of having non-professional actors play themselves - characters and dialogue are closely derived from Reality” (Andrew, 2005, p.48).

Mentioning Kiarostami's statement in *10 on Ten* that he is neither a *realisateur* nor a *metteur en scene*, Andrew claims that “his strategy, however, also involves an attempt to re-think the relationship of the director to the viewer” (Andrew, 2005, p.48). In fact, this is one of the issues I will discuss in the third chapter concerning the directing of digital film. Apart from the theoretical aspects, the information that Andrew provides about the backstage world of *Ten* and working with actors is quite useful for assessing and analysing the film in the third chapter of this research, especially the section on acting. In fact, Andrew's book is full of questions and partial or brief answers about *Ten*; some

of them are irrelevant to my research but I will address some of the relevant issues such as surveillance cameras in detail, emphasising the director's ideas.

As we see in Andrew's research, Kiarostami's special method of creating the script for his digital works has drawn some scholars' attention to this subject. Alex Munt (2006) analysed the script of *Ten* as a digital film in his article entitled *Digital Kiarostami & The Open Screenplay*. He thinks that films such as *Ten* introduce a new direction for cinema which he calls 'Digital-Micro-Cinema', and this has emerged from the alliance of micro budget film-making and digital production. He claims that Kiarostami's 'open script' in *Ten* is a new type of scriptwriting in this regard. He does not claim that this model of screenplay is new, and he explains its relation with the French New Wave and Italian Neorealism, and even with Kiarostami's pre-digital works. Thus, he only analyses *Ten* to discover the reconfiguration of this model in a digital context and he mainly focuses on two themes: 'access' and 'intimacy'. He states that the structure of an open screenplay enables the film-maker to bypass censorship, while the audience has 'privileged access' to the film and understands the film by watching the ten different parts and deciding about the conclusion. Regarding intimacy, he mentions the importance of talk and the location where talk occurs. He explains that Kiarostami knows the importance of location as a 'catalyst' for conversation in films. Munt mentions the usage of cars in the pre-digital films of Kiarostami and the difference of such usage in *Ten* because the camera is on the dashboard and mainly frames the actors rather than the exteriors. He concluded: "In *Ten*, Kiarostami has 'injected' an order (of his stories) within the chaos of the city to fuse fictional and documentary narrative modes" (Munt, 2006, p.10).

In the next step, Munt (2006) considers the film as ten modules assembled by Kiarostami; he investigates the variation and repetition in each module and the whole story and claims that we can see these compositional principles in each module and the whole story (assembled modules). He also provides a diagram of this that we use in the third chapter. Using this kind of analysis, he recognises some symmetry in the structure of the story. He also shows how Kiarostami avoids real time, which is one of the usages of digital cinema. He concludes: "This cinematic manipulation of *Ten* via symmetry, hierarchy, repetition and variation (all fundamental principles of design practice) can be

read in relation to the filmmaker's previous career. Kiarostami's path to the cinema was via graphic design and illustration, which forms an explanation for his dexterity with these compositional principles". (Munt, 2006, p.13) Although he mentions Manovich's theory on new media very briefly and accepts that *Ten* to some extent has this kind of logic, he mentions the speciality of *Ten* in terms of narrative, which he believes is related to Kiarostami's use of design methods.

Daly's approach to *Ten* by Kiarostami is very interesting. She believes that the digital camera or, as he called it, the 'computer-camera', acts as a collaborator for some innovative film-makers, who let the camera or another machine work by itself to some extent. "The aesthetic is that of an algorithm, initially structured by an auteur but then allowed to play out unaffected" (Daly, 2008, p.128). She believes the camera, the car, and the traffic of Tehran controlled the camera movement in *Ten*, not the director. She claims that these factors even affected Kiarostami's editing. However, she adds: "we find narrative and stylistic sense and meaning – a new combination of machine-human cooperation. Behind the scene the camera has moved beyond the pen - the camera is now a computer and vice versa." (Daly, 2008, p.129) Thus, in the case of *Ten* she believes in something beyond Astruc's Camera Stylo. We will investigate *Ten* as well as other aspects of digital cinema in the third and fourth chapters and point out some of her ideas again.

The scholar Scott Krzych (2010) has also investigated Kiarostami's digital works and has distinguished them from the other work of this master of Iranian cinema. Although his philosophical approach to Kiarostami's films is different from our perspective, we find some useful points in his article *Auto-Motivation: Digital Cinema in Kiarostami's Relation Aesthetic* regarding Kiarostami's move to digitalization. Krzych follows D.N. Rodowick's (2008) philosophical idea about digital film. Rodowick believes that the difference between digital and film lies in film and digital as substances. Thus, even if a film-maker applies classical methods to make a film in digital, that digital film will be different from reality in a specific time and space because it is an electronic image made up of digital codes. Rodowick believes that "cinema has become more like language than image" (Rodowick, 2008, p.166). Therefore, Krzych believes that the meaning of Kiarostami's work became more complicated after his entry into the realm of digital. Moreover, the "lightweight camera enhances the freedom of mobility"

(Krzych, 2010, p.26) for Kiarostami. Krzych investigates his pre-digital works such as *Close Up*, which has a kind of resemblance to his digital works, and then discusses *Ten* and *ABC Africa*, which show the advantages of “a medium (digital video) that allows for a manner of cinematic style that actually eschews style itself” (Krzych, 2010, p.27).

The analogy of *Close Up* and Kiarostami's digital works was also mentioned by Kiarostami in his interview with me. He said “I thought if we had digital camera, *Close Up* becomes *Close Up*. All factors of digital filmmaking were ready, me, my thought, and usage of non-actors.” (Kiarostami, 2012) In fact, Kiarostami tries to produce a kind of intimacy in these films; furthermore, “blurred boundaries between fact and fiction leave little room for any determinant ascription of meaning.” (Krzych, 2010, p.27) He believes that Kiarostami applies a mode of reflexivity in film which attracts the audience like a narrative film. He also mentions “Kiarostami's documentary aesthetic foreground and even broader field of relational and relative components constituting the image's 'truth' where the camera exists as just one participant among others.” (Krzych, 2010, p.28) Krzych explains the role of reality and truth in Kiarostami's cinema and refers to Laura Mulvey's idea about the representation of reality in Kiarostami's works. Based on Kiarostami's idea about the relationship of his work with reality before and after digitalisation, Mulvey (2007) believes that “the cinema itself begins to materialise in the gap separating the event and its adequate representation” (Mulvey, 2007, p.23). In fact, Mulvey praises the reflexivity in Kiarostami's work which reveals the distortion between an event and its cinematic representation. After discussing reality in Kiarostami's works, Krzych tries to understand the extent to which changing the medium from analogue to digital can change the effect of image in terms of reality. In fact, digital filming is about more than just bypassing the limitation of analogue if we take the ontology of digital images into consideration. After investigating some analogue films by Kiarostami such as *Close Up* and *Life and Nothing More*, “we might say that such celluloid-based films prefigure the more nuanced achievement of rationality that emerges when Kiarostami takes a small camera into his own hands [in *ABC Africa*] or shoots a feature where the action occurs entirely in his absence [like *Ten*]” (Krzych, 2010, p.31).

Krzych also borrowed the idea of the relational aesthetic from Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) to describe Kiarostami's works, particularly his digital ones. He believes that "Kiarostami catches the moving world with his camera and his role is like that of a technician rather than an author. What his digital pieces evidence, though, is a kind of movement in which the camera not only documents movement but also participates in the movement in a way that exceeds the director's control, thereby challenging conceptions of authorship and style" (Krzych, 2010, p.32). In fact, Kiarostami explains this kind of directing in *10 on Ten* as non-professional directing. We explain this in more detail in this chapter when I explain Daly's idea.

Krzych tries to prove that Kiarostami's digital works are the continuation of his analogue works, especially as he retains his interest in the moving car as the film location, although the director claims that the digital camera is the cause of significant change in his work.

Adam Ganz and Lina Khatib from Royal Holloway, University of London, are among the scholars who have used the term 'Iranian Digital Cinema' in their article entitled *Digital cinema: The transformation of film practice and aesthetics* in 2006. They assume that digital cinema established a new relationship between film-maker and audience, and they found this to be the case in two Iranian films, *Ten* by Kiarostami and *20 Fingers* by Mania Akbari. They also "argue that digital filmmaking, in conjoining the traditional methods and rituals of filmmaking with the different traditions of the electronic media, is creating a new kind of practice associated with the purely digital image" (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.22). They also mentioned the usage of 'video assist' (a small screen with the ability to record film on video at the scene) in cinematic work by directors and crews, and they argue that this kind of new technology has consequences for the relationship between director and cast, which has continued in digital cinema production. They also claim that digital cinema offers film-makers and actors a lot of facilities and practice that had only previously been available for big budget films in Hollywood, such as multiple takes. Indeed, "The particular kind of studied naturalism epitomised by the likes of Pacino, Brando and De Niro, and dependent on creating a performance from multiple takes, improvisation and rehearsing on camera, has become available to cinema of all kinds and all budgets" (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.25). They

explain that the digital camera does not have restricted material; it can be switched on and actors can act continuously. In the other words, "The camera is not attempting to frame the action but only to cover it" (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.26). Thus, a new kind of relationship between actor and camera emerges which we can find in *Ten* and *20 Fingers*. They argue this new relation influences directing and also empowers improvisation techniques. They emphasise that the use of the digital camera, which is always on and does not require professional lighting, eliminates the boundaries between behind and in front of the camera: "The elision of the boundaries between the space in front and behind the camera means that the actors participate in the making of the film in a different way. The boundaries between the actor as person and the actor in performance become less clear when all can be recorded and edited into the finished film" (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.27).

However, the authors of this article do not seem to have full knowledge of the Iranian cinema and its century-long heritage. They believe "The introduction of digital technology to emerging film industries like Iran's has allowed the creation of all kinds of cinema at once in places that did not have cinema before or where cinema practice was limited"(Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p28). They mention Iran as a country without a cinema industry, and as a result they do not discover the relation between the Iranian pre-digital and digital cinema. Although their approach to these two films is like an investigation of a unique phenomenon, their theory allows them only a partial understanding of some points; this can be seen in the way they mention some issues in context such as film censorship and pushing social boundaries through digital cinema. They believe that *Ten* and *20 Fingers* "illustrate digital technology's changing of the relationship with the subject of film, how it allows us to go places we do not normally go" (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.30). I will use some of the ideas they adopt from Donvey (2004) regarding the intimacy provided by electronic pictures (such as CCTV and digital video) and explain the idea that "Video is demotic. We have probably seen ourselves on video; we do not know how we look on 35mm film. On film we look at other people. On video we watch ourselves". (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.34)

## *Recent Relevant Theoretical Discussions in Digital Cinema*

There are several points in the Oxford scholar Marin Hirschfeld's thesis, "*Intimacy in Contemporary Digital Cinema*" that drew my attention during my research, although this thesis focuses on philosophical aspects of digitalisation. Hirschfeld claims that "a major assumption underlying this project is that all contemporary cinema is in fact digital cinema. Regardless of whether films are fully computer animated, filmed on digital video or on film stock, all films today are eventually edited and processed digitally" (Hirschfeld, 2012, p.iii). In fact, all the films he investigates are filmed partially by video and video digital. Thus, this research is interesting for me because, firstly, most of the films I investigate in Iranian cinema are filmed by digital video and, secondly, intimacy is one of the factors we point out while investigating the films, although we focus on film analysis as the main method. He follows Giles Deleuze's notion in his book *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (2005) about will to art. He said that Deleuze believes that "contemporary digital cinema must have a basic will to art: a new aesthetic principle, a new function of the image, a new politics, a new representational potential distinct from those that have come before it" (Hirschfeld, 2012, p.iii). He then claims that the artistic potential of 'will to art' in movies that used video, such as the *Benny's Video* (1992 by Haneke) and *Family Viewing* (by Atom Egoyan), was intimacy. In fact, he focuses on the early days of digital cinema between 1980 and 1990, although he expands his conclusion to films such as *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and *Quarantine* (2008) as films that look like home videos. Of course, he traces this potential in home movies back to the pre-digital age. Needless to say, there were not many home movies made in Iran due to the expense, but home videos and their influences are the subject of discussion when we talk about digital cinema, especially in the work of Kiarostami.

In conclusion, following Deleuze who believes that "electronic images will have to be based on still another will to art" (Deleuze, 2005, p.255) and others, Hirschfeld shows that the artistic potential of video is capturing and representing intimacy. In contrast, by analysing films in this dissertation, I show that the search for the representation of reality may or may not be caused by intimacy. On the other hand, in our analysis of film we do not consider any diegetic video or digital video as part of film, and we try to compare and investigate digital



footage and film separately. Finally, we mentioned the intimacy of handheld camera and video during the film analysis in this thesis, but other theorists and film-makers mentioned this fact before Hirschfeld, and we prefer to quote them as references.

Another Oxford DPhil dissertation on digital cinema, entitled *Toward a New Realism: The depiction of space and time in digital cinema*, published in 2007, is about a specific part of digital cinema that has played a dominant role in Hollywood cinema blockbusters since the 1990s. As this dissertation was completed in the middle of the first decade of the new century, the researcher, William Brown, did not have the opportunity to experience a cinema completely taken over by digital technology. Thus, he only investigates the 35mm films that used CGI as visual effects. Focusing on CGI in 35 mm films (in 2007), Brown only discusses blockbusters. He believes that “the Hollywood spectacle in particular exploits the potential of digital technology to represent, or, more pertinently, to simulate, the impossible, and also to produce a particular mode of representation, or simulation, of time and reality.” (Brown, 2007, p.2) In fact, this thesis is about the aesthetic points of digital cinema and representation. He believes that “the smallest ontological unit in cinema changes from being a measure of time (a frame), to being a measure of space (a pixel). On the basis of this fundamental difference in the minimal material constituents of the film image in analogue and digital cinema, we can already infer that the two kinds of film technology embody different aesthetic possibilities.” (Brown, 2007, pp. 19-20) By analysing the films of Orson Welles and Roman Polanski, he argues that the creation of a new form in digital cinema is owned by cinematic modernity. Although Brown (2007) explores how digital films depict the world differently compared to analogue cinema, he assumes that this goes back to the ‘general aesthetic level’.

As he focuses on this level and investigates films that use digital special effects, he finds some real changes in editing and narrative as well, and he believes that this new narrative differs from classical cause-and-effect narrative. These changes are caused by the kind of representation of the world that this kind of film offers. He believes that, “in contemporary American films, digital cinema moves toward not only a new way of representing the world, but more radically, it moves toward representing a different world, a world that is different precisely

because of the way in which it is seen differently” (Brown, 2007, p.4). In fact most of the digital cinema we investigate in this thesis is different from what he considers to be digital cinema. Even in the last chapter, I do not investigate a film such as *Kingdom of Solomon* aesthetically. However, his explanation (based on Manovich’s and Bazin’s theories) about the difference between digital images and analogue images is very interesting, and it seems true for digital cinema in general. Brown (2007) claims the analogue image represents the objects of the real world while the digital image simulates them because this kind of image is just mechanical codes. Thus, “digital cinema is cinema of simulation and, as such, it involves a new mode of representation” (Brown, 2007, p.20). Nevertheless this ontological discussion is not a matter for our thesis, even when we discuss representation.

Kristen M. Daly conducts a comprehensive investigation in the field of digital cinema in her dissertation entitled *Cinema 3.0*. She “argue[s] that the introduction of digital and computer technologies represents a larger shift, which is taking cinema from an industrial art to an electronic art and increasingly to a tele-cultural form in the interstices of art and information” (Daly, 2008, p.2). She tries to show how cinema changed in terms of production, distribution and exhibition by digital technology. She is also interested in the aesthetics and social effect of this new cinema. However, for her the term ‘cinema 3.0’ is broader than digital cinema in my dissertation and it contains all moving images produced and distributed by computers. She “includes everything from the traditional feature movie on the big screen to web video, cell phone, shorts clips in taxi rear view mirrors and machinima.” (Daly, 2008, p.2) Although we do not follow this definition of cinema, the distribution of movies via DVD and the Internet are considered in my dissertation as well. She states: “since 2002, the revenue to studios from DVD rentals and sales has surpassed the box office from theatrical release” (Daly, 2008, p.68), and she adds that on-line distribution is ‘distribution on demand’. Thus, the distributors take less risk and “online DVD distributors are enabling filmmakers to have more direct control over the distribution of their movies” (Daly, 2008, p.70). We will explain Iran’s special experience of this kind of distribution and censorship. In the case of theatrical exhibition, Iran has had a different experience to that of the West. She states: “Due to complications of economies and the current expense of high-quality

digital projectors, theatres have been very slow to adopt digital projection” (Daly, 2008, p.87). In Iran, due to shortages of material and sanctions, it happened very rapidly, as we will explain in the next chapter. In terms of changing aesthetics and style in digital film, she investigates some movies like *Ten* as harbingers of these changes.

Daly believes that “digital technologies do not simply provide a better tool, continuing on the same path of aesthetics and style of film, but rather will encourage a very different mode of cinema from film in content, form and process” (Daly, 2008, pp.109-110). She does not underestimate the usage of digital cameras as tools and their problems, but at the same time she reminds us of the ‘Camera Stylo’ notion of Astruc and investigates spontaneity, flexibility, unobtrusiveness, and intimacy of digital cameras. She believes that “Digital technologies eliminate the cumbersome nature of film, opening possibilities for realism, spontaneity, the unexpected and the unscripted” (Daly, 2008, p.117). She then discusses some movies and documentaries made with the help of light digital cameras, with their flexibility and sensibility. She mentions the methods used in some digital work, such as using non-professional actors and long takes, and explains how digital cameras facilitate this style but she notices that “all these stylistics, so natural to digital technologies, were prefigured and anticipated by the filmmakers of the Nouvelle Vague and the Neorealists” (Daly, 2008, p.123). She notes that the contradiction lies in digital editing, which facilitates the cutting and pasting of footage, while the use of long takes in recent digital movies has increased.

Despite the lack of sufficient academic research in Iran on digital cinema, I found some short articles by journalists on news sites such as BBC Persian which refer to some of the issues of digital cinema in Iran. I use these briefly in the second chapter.

## **Chapter 2: History of Digital Cinema in Iran**

## *Prologue*

As I discussed in the introduction and showed in the literature review, there is no comprehensive research to demonstrate an overall view of Iranian digital cinema. Thus, in this chapter, I will try to describe the history of digital cinema from its emergence in Iran until recent years in order to show the importance of this new cinema in Iranian cinematic discourse and also offer an overview of different aspects of this phenomenon in Iran. I will mainly use the interviews I conducted with artists, managers and technicians involved in digital cinema in Iran as well as some recent online sources. I also try to examine some theories of digital cinema in some sections such as editing although the main purpose of this chapter is to describe the whole phenomenon which is analysed in the following chapters. I will explain the trend of digital cinema in Iran in detail in the following sections and will investigate some of its external and internal causes; first, however, I will describe the first moves towards the digitalisation of cinema in Iran, its relationship with devices imported into Iran, and the Iranian talent who tried to use it in the film industry. I will also explain the overall perspective of Iranian digital cinema. As for digital special effects, I will postpone the discussion of some of these issues to the last chapter of this dissertation, where I will discuss the features of Iranian digital cinema.

## *First Steps in Technology*

Although some film-makers believe that digital cinema in Iran started with the introduction of the digital camera, other film-makers and scholars such as S. Razavian (2012) believe that we can find the first footprint of digital cinema in the Iranian cinema before 2000, in television and video works. The first instance of the transferring of a computer image to celluloid occurred following the purchase of a film recorder in *Hozeh Honarii* (a governmental Institute for Artistic Affairs) in the early 1980s. *Hozeh Honarii* (art realm) is the artistic institute of Islamic Development Organization. A group of artists in *Hozeh Honarii* used this technology to make a very short animation, although the technology became useless after a while. Then, the Saba Institute, a governmental institute for making animations, bought a scanner to transfer

video pictures to negative film of high quality; however, they were unable to use it adequately due to technical problems. In the mid-1990s, two things happened that indirectly influenced the future of Iranian cinema. The government made substantial loans to eighteen private companies to buy broadcasting and professional video equipment from abroad with the help of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). This equipment encouraged independent film-making in Iran because of its low-budget material and small, lightweight cameras. On the other hand, directors and producers updated themselves on recording video onto celluloid (Rajabiforotan, 2008). At the same time, Resane Pooya, a private institute directed by Jafar Fatemi, attempted its first innovation in terms of non-linear editing for cinema, which will be explored in a later chapter. Then Mohammad Fijani, an experienced cinematographer and laboratory technician, made a film recorder with an animation camera and a high-resolution monitor for converting commercial video to film for the cinema; some producers were motivated to change their video movies to film using these devices. For example, *Our Time* (2002) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad was made by video Beta-Cam recorded on film by this method. Bayram Fasli, a young director and cinematographer, made a film recorder by assembling a 35mm camera and high-resolution monitor, and *Our Time* (2002) was transferred to film from video with this device. However, none of these were standard and they simply provided experience in preparing the atmosphere for digital cinema.

In this section I begin my exploration of the history of digital cinema with digital production, which is related to digital cameras, because it is more contiguous and continuous. Then we will discuss editing and other aspects.

Although the first works of Iranian digital cinema (in this respect) are about peace and humanity, the first digital camera was introduced to Iran and the Middle East in wartime. During the first Gulf War, the majority of reporters and journalists were equipped with small DV camcorders such as the Sony PC series, with good mobility and high resolution (Rezada, 2011). Rezadad, the former production general manager of Islamic Republic Iranian Broadcasting (IRIB) believes that some of the foreign reporters and journalists did not take their cameras back to their countries, selling them instead to Middle Eastern journalists and film-makers, and these were the first digital cameras in Iran

(Rezadad, 2011). If we believe this claim, the first camera to have been seen by an Iranian professional may have been a camcorder brought by Kave Golestan (an Iranian Journalist who worked for the BBC during the Iraq war) to Iran and introduced to Mahmoud Kalari, an Iranian cinematographer (Shidrang, 2012). However, there is controversy among certain merchants about the first cameras to be imported and introduced to the Iranian cinema. Youssef Mostafavi, who has been working as a merchant in the film industry for more than 20 years, claims that the DSR-PD100 Sony was the first digital camera to be imported to Iran (Mostafavi, 2012), but Fereydoon Soori, one of the most famous and oldest merchants, believes that the first digital camera to be introduced to the Iranian cinema was the DSR 9000 Sony. He imported a few of these models and sold them to some famous Iranian directors such as Reza Mir Karimi in 1997. He had imported a lot of mini DV camcorders such as the Sony FX10 before that time, but these were bought by amateur customers (Soori, 2012). Soori and Mostafavi, pioneers in the introduction of digital cameras, believe that the trade in digital cameras increased rapidly. Particularly after the introduction of the DSR-PD150 and DSR 250 Sony around 2000, most companies changed their equipment in favour of digitalization. Soori and Mostafavi both believe that the DSR-PD150 Sony was the most popular camcorder to be introduced to Iran, and a wide range of professional and amateur customers bought them for various purposes, from making homemade videos to journalism and finally feature-length films. In fact, this camera is a popular mobile camera in Iran. This recalls Manovich's (2001) belief about the mobile camera, which is "probably the most important case of cinema's influence on cultural interfaces" (Manovich 2001, p.79). We will discuss films such as *Ten*, which was made with this kind of mobile camera, and its influence on Iranian cinema in the next sections and the third chapter.

Digital non-linear editing was introduced to Iran several years before digital cameras. Iranian film-makers converted analogue films to digital in order to use the facilities of this kind of editing. Ahmadi, the technical manager of Tehran Faraje, a pioneer company in the importing of equipment for digital non-linear editing, believes that the first computer board imported to Iran for that purpose was the PAR in 1994. This board belonged to a Canadian company named DPS, from which Tehran Faraje obtained its solicitorship in 1996. Soon after

this time, non-linear editing became popular among film-makers; however, in 1997 the real-time boards were introduced by Pinnacle and then Matrox to other companies in Iran. The boards introduced by Matrox become very popular among Iranian film-makers, even when the digital camera was introduced to the Iranian film industry (Ahmadi, 2012).

According to findings from the market for digital cameras and editing suites, digital production had completely arrived on the scene by 1997, after the introduction of the digital camera, although the usage of digital non-linear editing had become familiar a few years before. However, professional editors and cinematographers working in professional cinema took a different view. They did not embrace or accept digital equipment for years. Although some companies, such as Resane Pooya, offered the whole process of digital editing, most professional editors avoided using computers, claiming that they were not accurate in terms of negative cutting and the final result. We can count Mastane Mohajer and Shahrzad Pooya among those editors who attempted to use digital editing (Hasandoost, 2012). *The May Lady* (1999) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad was one the first films to use digital editing with a primary method that used Avid Express DV. The software made for video was adapted by Resane Pooya for use in cinema. However, before 2005 most professional conservative editors did not trust digital editing. In 2005, M.R. Moeini edited part of *MAXX* (2005) digitally; then H. Hasandoost edited *Bide Majnoon* (2005) with DPS Velocity although this is not complete software in terms of cinema, and certain processes were required in order to prepare it for film. However after introducing the Final Cut Pro software, the Moviola was completely eliminated from film companies (Hasandoost, 2012). Despite the long resistance to digital editing among professionals, the use of digital cameras even primary versions, caught on rapidly. One can name *Moje Morde* (2001) by Ebrahim Hatamikia among governmental directors and *Ten* (2002) by Abbas Kiarostami among independents in this regard.

In fact, Kiarostami had a big impact on the digitalisation of cinema in Iran. Initially, around 2000, digital camcorders acted like other video cameras for film-makers because the first series of this kind of camera was as large as a Beta-Cam and its footage was sometimes converted to analogue for editing in Iran, due to the lack of sufficient editing hardware for digital formats. Nevertheless, in



1997, *Taste of Cherry* by Abbas Kiarostami won the prize for the best film at the Cannes Film Festival, and its final scene was captured with a mini DV camcorder. Kiarostami remembers this incident, as he initially saw it as a piece of bad luck for his film. The negatives of the last scene were damaged in the laboratory and he did not have time to reshoot because of the changing season and the colour of the soil. Therefore, he used the pictures from the DV camcorder that was used for recording 'behind the scenes' instead of the intended final scene; surprisingly, he won the *Palme d'Or*. During the making of *Taste of Cherry*, he realized how small digital cameras had the ability to avoid disturbing the 'natural' behaviour of people that he had been trying to achieve through different methods, such as eliminating the disturbing effect of the clapperboard's clap and saying 'action' and so on. It was a beneficial coincidence for Iranian digital cinema that the mini DV appealed to Kiarostami. The second 'chance' event occurred in 2000 when Kiarostami and his colleagues went to Uganda to prepare a visual scenario for a film about HIV/AIDS funded by the United Nations (UNODP). They used a Panasonic Palm-Cam (another small mini DV camera) for 'making notes' as Kiarostami called it in *10 on Ten* (2004). Kiarostami claims that, when he went back to Iran and reviewed his 'notes', he realised that here was precisely the material he wanted for the documentary about HIV/AIDS; hence, he started to edit. *ABC Africa* is a unique film of Kiarostami's that has been screened in Iranian cinemas since 2000. Laura Mulvey describes the digital epilogue of *Taste of Cherry* for Kiarostami as "a possible resurrection and phoenix-like return from the ashes of cinema to the possibility of a more intense engagement with his society and its problems" (Mulvey, 2007, p.29) through the use of digital technology in his digital work *Ten*.

Apart from what Kiarostami has done since 2002, I would claim that we can find some signposts in digital film-making among professional film-makers since 2006 in movies such as *Mainline* (2006) by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, *Offside* (2006) by Jafar Panahi, *Men at Work* (2006) by Mani Haghighi, and *Night Bus* by Kiumars Poorahmad (2007), although there were no professional cinematic digital cameras in Iran until 2009. These films may have been the consequence of new HD and HDV cameras, such as the Z1 Sony, which was imported to Iran around 2005 and offered the film-maker more acceptable resolution.

Nevertheless, this camera can take its place among small mobile cameras such as the DV-Cam series.

Kamran Saharkhiz (2012), one of the pioneering technicians of digital cinema in Iran, believes that “technology came to Iran prior to its utilization.” It seems that, although digital editing software had arrived in Iran, no one was using it professionally. Moreover, digital special effects in the Iranian cinema go back to 1993 in a fiction film called *Man Zamin Raa Doost Daram* (1993) by Abolhasan Davoudi. For this fiction movie, the film-makers used a primary scanner to convert part of the film that needed special effects to digital and then made some changes with graphic software, before finally recording the film with very primitive methods. This process was used just for one shot lasting a few seconds, and it was the first test of using computers in film in the Iranian cinema. However, it was not a successful process in terms of the result. There are obvious changes in the colour and quality of the film at the point of the visual effect, and this made it unbelievable in comparison with other kinds of special effects. These changes were made using devices that had been bought previously and the process soon became out-dated. Thus it took some time before digital cinema found its place in Iranian cinema. The first film with professional, acceptable digital special effects was *Eshghe Film* (2001) by Ebrahim Vahidzadeh. This film has around 3.5 minutes of visual effects but some of its footage was taken to Poland for scanning in full HD format. At the same time, Studio Saba (a governmental institute) installed a scanner and recorder, and the remaining part of the process was done in Iran. Of course, IRIB started using digital visual effects in its productions in 1999 in a historical drama series named *Mohakemeh*. However, this series was filmed on video (Beta-cam); thus, the process is easier than cinema, and 100 minutes of various kinds of digital special effects were used. Finally, *Thirteen Cats on the Roof* (2003) used thirteen minutes of digital visual effects and won a special prize at the Fajr International Film Festival (the biggest film festival in Iran). Thus, the Iranian cinema started to trust in computers for special effects in 2003 (Motamedi, 2012).

Progress in sound recording and sound editing began with other aspects of digital cinema. Masoud Behnam, a pioneer of digital sound in Iran, used Digital Tape Recording (DAT) for some work related to music in 1993. Professional

sound engineers did not trust these devices although the sound quality of some of them is considerably better than analogue Nagra devices (Behnam, 2012). Of course, some sound recorders such as Hasan Najafi and Mahmood Samakbashi were tested for some films. In fact, economic pressure on the film industry in Iran and a shortage of sound tapes prompted producers to ask sound recorders to use DAT, although this kind of device does not record time codes and has certain problems in syncing sound and pictures in long shots. However, most professionals wanted more professional devices. At the same time, some directors were using digital cameras to record sound, such as Abbas Kiarostami. Furthermore, TV producers used digital cameras as sound recorders for most of their work (Delpak, 2012). Since 2005, modern digital sound devices (such as Atom and HHP) have been imported to Iran with government support, and sound recording has moved towards complete digitalisation (Malakooti, 2012)

In the case of sound editing, the movement towards digitalisation has fluctuated due to the activity of some professional sound designers such as Masood Behnam. Some sound software has been used by amateurs since 1992 but they are not acceptable to professionals. Behnam (2012) attempted to devise digital sound editing and mixing for cinema in 1997. He connected a computer to an editing table and used computer software for editing, but an unfortunate incident caused this to fail. Subsequently, he contacted Dolby Digital in 2000 and used the Dolby Digital system for *Born Under Libra* (2001), although the process was done in Paris. Then he imported the first digital mixer (DD 1500 Akai) to Iran. However, the development of sound software continued and finally became a true rival to some professional devices. Resane Pooya was one of the pioneers of sound. It imported some amateur software (such as early versions of Pro Tools) and used it in video production. However, professionals such as M.R. Delpak still resisted the use of this kind of device for cinema although he edited the sound of *ABC Africa* (2001), the first digital film by Abbas Kiarostami, using Adobe Premier (Delpak, 2012). With the introduction of professional software such as Noendo in 2004, the whole sound industry moved over to computers completely. The first digital surround sound studio was opened in 2004, although it was still necessary to go to France to mix the final sound and use the Dolby Digital licence (Behnam 2012).

## *Masters and Pioneers*

I have discussed the relationship between the technology introduced to Iran and the progress of digital cinema. Now, I must go deeper and find the cause and effect in the Iranian context that led the digital movement in Iran, based on film-makers' and technicians' ideas. Although the digital camera had been introduced to Iran before 2000, the first serious digital work in the cinema began after 2000 with the support of two masters of Iranian cinema, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Abbas Kiarostami. In fact, the actions of these two internationally recognised film-makers have had a significant effect on the body of Iranian cinema.

Makhmalbaf made his first move towards digital cinema with *Testing Democracy* in 2000. *Testing Democracy* (2000) is a docudrama which discusses the presidential election in Iran. Mohsen Makhmalbaf acted in the film in his real role (as director). He scrapped a scene shot on 35 mm film and decided to make the film with a digital camera with the help of his friend. The two main characters start their journey to Tehran while the election is in progress, before finally arriving in Tehran and meeting the president. Makhmalbaf (2011) claimed that he used two directors on this film to show that we can have dialogue and discussion instead of a monologue by the director, and this device can help promote democracy. Moreover, by choosing a non-professional as second director, he wanted to show that this kind of film-making and expression of ideas does not need professionals and technicians. Makhmalbaf (2011) claimed that he made this film with a small Sony digital camera, a minimal crew and a very low budget for several reasons. He wanted to prove that digital film-making changes the situation of cinema. "It reduces the domination of capital, decreases the censorship and even reduces the domination of technicians in cinema" (Makhmalbaf, 2011). He thinks that digital film-making is not only a revolution in production but also a significant step toward author cinema. He believes we can reach real author cinema with the help of digital technology because many factors interfere in filmmakers' thoughts about making a film, including producers who manage the capital, censorship by the government, and even technicians, who may influence the film-maker's ideas by their abilities, thoughts or weaknesses. Moreover, a bulky 35mm camera disturbs the real world. Thus, a realistic director should strive to

rebuild the real and natural behaviour of people. However, a small digital camera offers the film-maker a chance to concentrate on his ideas rather than other technical issues. He emphasises his use of the camera like a pen in his film and tries to visualise it with his handy-cam digital camera. Of course, Alexandre Astruc mentioned this ability of the camera in his famous article 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Camera-Stylo* from The New Wave', but Makhmalbaf reused it for the digital camera in his film several times.

In fact, Makhmalbaf, as a director, writer, editor and producer, has embraced many new phenomena and technologies in his career, as he claimed (Makhmalbaf, 2011). Thus, in the case of editing, he was one of the first professional film-makers to use digital editing in *Resane Pooya*. Then he bought his own digital editing suite (Avid) and has also used Adobe Premiere to edit film of his family since 1997. Two characteristics of Makhmalbaf distinguish him from other directors who started using digital devices. First, he is completely aware of the freedom offered to him as an author by digital devices. Second, he is a famous and internationally recognised film-maker whose works are shown and appreciated in international festivals such as the Venice Film Festival. Thus, the younger generation of film-makers are motivated to use digital devices in order to overcome low budgets and censorship. Makhmalbaf also showed that some of his digital films could be more impressive than his 35mm films to some extent, as he claimed that his digital documentary named *Afghan Alphabet* (2001) changed the lives of more than half a million Afghan refugees in Iran and gave them an opportunity to study by influencing the government. He made that film with a mini DV in one week, finishing post-production a week later and showing it to different government departments to persuade them to change the law on refugees. This film also won the best film prize in Document Art Film Festival in Germany (Makhmalbaf, 2011).

Makhmalbaf also found that working with non-professional actors, who are always his preferred choice, is much easier when making films with a digital camera because he felt that non-professionals lost their confidence in front of big 35 mm cameras, and it was a time-consuming process installing them. "Of course, some professional actors did not recognise small digital camera as a professional device in early days and considered it too small to be serious" and did not offer their best performance in front of it (Makhmalbaf, 2011). The

attitude of Makhmalbaf toward society and the new generation of film-makers has played a big role in his approach to digital cinema as someone who wishes to share his knowledge with others and teach and train other film-makers. Makhmalbaf (2011) believes that Iranians are eager to become involved in film-making and cinema. Before digital film-making, a large number of young people made short films, while an even greater number did not have the chance and budget to make films. He shows this interest in cinema in Iran in his documentary, *Salaam Cinema* (1995). He claims that digital cinema brought this opportunity into the homes of Iranians where they could make films as if with a pen, which gives one an opportunity to be a writer. "Homes are full of pens but few people are writers. One who has nothing to say does not write a book. However, the temptation of playing with a camera produces a huge quantity of footage which does not originate from artistic thought" (Makhmalbaf, 2011). In fact, the massive number of film-makers damages the atmosphere of cinema because many of them are untrained and have no artistic talent. Thus, Makhmalbaf (2011) believes, the audience have the good fortune of having several voices in new digital cinematic and cultural atmosphere while, at the same time, a great deal of noise prevents them from finding the true and artistic ones. On the other hand, the capital brought by producers, although limiting the number of film-makers and censoring their ideas, places economic confidence in the industry and enables films to be watched (Makhmalbaf, 2011).

Makhmalbaf's ideas and works can be considered the first spark of the digital revolution among the new generation of film-makers in Iran. They have a passion for film-making and they watched Makhmalbaf's works, made with very small and cheap devices, express fresh ideas about society and reach an international audience. Thus they motivate engagement in the digital film-making revolution. Although the aesthetics and beauty of the pictures in most of Makhmalbaf's 35mm films are very important, the most important aspect of his first digital films is freedom: Freedom of speech and freedom from capital. The former appealed to the young generation in comparison to the work of other film-makers such as Kiarostami.

I have already noted Abbas Kiarostami as another pioneer film-maker who has embraced digital film-making in Iran. Although his first and second ventures into digital cinema (*Taste of Cherry* and *ABC Africa*) were partly unintentional and

he had not decided to use digital camera footage as part of his films, he finally embraced the digital camera completely in *Ten* (2002), and tried to theorise digital film-making in his didactic documentary, *10 on Ten* (2004), like Makhmalbaf. Of course, *Ten* is more impressive and internationally recognised in comparison with Makhmalbaf's digital works. *Ten* is about a woman giving rides to other women from different walks of life in her car and speaking with them on various subjects. In the next chapter, we will discuss the technique and content of the film, but here we should discuss how the film and its author became an important turning point in Iranian digital cinema. As we mentioned, master and internationally recognised film-makers play a big role in influencing the young generation of Iranian cinema. As the particular attitude of Kiarostami to nature and humanity, as seen through his works previously, has affected some artistic filmmakers in Iran for a while, *Ten* and his other digital films such as *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (2003) motivate them to pursue their ideas with low or zero budgets. Kiarostami also believes that the digital camera frees film-makers from capital and equipment. Kiarostami, like Makhmalbaf, appreciated the digital camera for not disturbing the non-professional actors and discovered that the new era of *Camera-Style* had begun. In fact, *Ten* was based on the theory of Kiarostami as realist who likes to eliminate everything that might interfere in his attempts to achieve a truthful portrait of everyday life. Thus, Kiarostami's approach to digital film is different from Makhmalbaf's. In *Testing Democracy*, the directors have the main roles, while in *Ten* the director just watches and records reality happening in front of the camera (of course, he has a role in designing it before it unfolds). Therefore, it would have been very hard (but not impossible) to make *Testing Democracy* with a 35mm camera, but *Ten* is bounded by the digital camera. *Ten* is not only a digital film but is also a type of film-making that the digital camera offers to art cinema. We will discuss *Ten* and its special realism in the next chapter but I should mention here a particular point about this film that plays a role in motivating young artistic film-makers to embrace digital cinema. This kind of film does not need a large crew. Kiarostami (*10 On Ten*, 2004) states that he made it with ten people, some of whom were actors. He did not use a professional cinematographer and gaffer. He also relied on the sound being recorded by the camera (Delpak, 2012).

Ebrahim Hatamikia is another professional and impressive filmmaker in the Iranian cinema discourse who attempted to gain experience with digital cameras in 2000. He made *Moje Mordeh* (2000) with a DSR 135 DVCAM Sony, which was the biggest and latest digital camera in Iran at that time. The film is a drama about a general who wants to attack the US Navy; he also has problems with his family. This film, like most of Hatamikia's films is about war and its consequences. At first glance, it seems as if Hatamikia, a pro-government filmmaker who always receives budgets and licences for his films, was simply eager to gain new experience. Most of the reasons that propelled Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf into the realm of digital cinema are absent in *Moje Mordeh*, and the film is a drama with professional actors and a big professional crew. However, Mohammad Reza Sokoot (2011), one of the pioneer digital cinematographers and the director of photography (DOP) of this film, claims that usage of digital cameras was inevitable in making this film at that time. He believes that filming on fast boats at sea and taking the shots that the director desired would have been impossible with the 35mm cameras available in Iran at that time. Moreover, the digital camera gave the director the opportunity to review the rushes at the end of each day while filming on an island in the Persian Gulf. This was the first time a medium-sized digital camera had been used in Iranian cinema professionally and with a professional crew. Thus, the consequences of *Moje Mordeh* were completely different from the work of Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf. In fact, it sent a message to ordinary producers and film-makers that there was a move towards making ordinary films with low budgets. Hedayat Film, one of the biggest film companies in Iran, liked the experience of *Moje Mordeh* and attempted to repeat the experience with the same cinematographer. *Saghi* (2000), a romantic drama film directed by Mohamad Reza Alami and made after *Moje Mordeh*, had considerable success at the box office. As Sokoot (2011) claims, ordinary people who watch films in the cinema do not recognize the original format of film because sometimes 35 mm films have the same quality due to the old-fashioned technical process and old projectors. Therefore, there was a requirement for film recorders in Iran because recording digital videos on film abroad was expensive.

Of course, we can find other famous film-makers who made films in DV format for the cinema. For example, *Abadan* (2004) by Mani Haghighi had a



professional cast and crew including Mahmood Kalari as cinematographer and superstars Hedyeh Tehrani and Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, but it was unsuccessful.

Since 2005, HDV and mini HD cameras have been imported to Iran and have caused another movement in the Iranian cinema industry, as can be seen in the work of other impressive and internationally recognised film-makers.

Rakhshan Bani-Etemad made *Mainline* (2006) using an HDV Z1 Sony with Mahmood Kalari as cinematographer. *Mainline* is about a drug-addicted girl in a middle-class family in modern Tehran. Most of the actors in *Mainline* are professionals working from a structured script. What differentiates this film from the director's other works is the cinematography. In fact, this was first time that a famous film-maker in Iran had used a digital format to take technological advantage of digital colour grading. *Mainline* has a special colour grading like a monochrome film, with an emphasis on brown in order to present the depressing and hard situation faced by addicted people and their family. As this film was the first experience of artistic digital colour grading, great efforts were made in the laboratory and the studios to produce the final copy on positive film, and it won a special prize at the Fajr International Film Festival in 2006 in Iran for this innovative approach in Iranian cinema (SaharKhiz, 2012). Meanwhile, film-makers used the advantages of small digital cameras, such as hand-held filming and special movement, to represent a more realistic film than the first digital films, especially the work of Makhmalbaf. We should remember that they could not use different lenses and cinematic lenses in the first generation of HDV, and this inspired special methods of film-making and the kind of realistic films we discuss in the next chapter. However, the special and expressionist colour of *Mainline* is characteristic of the second generation of digital films in Iran. According to Manovich's (2012) notion, in the case of *Mainline* not only did the film-maker take advantage of the 'mobile camera' but also we can see "film-makers' reaction to increasing reliance on computer techniques in postproduction" (Manovich, 2001, pp.287-288) and using live images as 'elastic reality' for further changes on the computer.

Jafar Panahi is one of the most famous Iranian directors, who used HDV digital camera for his film *Offside* (2006). *Offside* is about some girls who are trying to

watch a football match in Iran; they are arrested by the police because women are not allowed to enter stadia for men's football in Iran. We will investigate *Offside* in the next chapter as a realistic film and one of the turning points in Iranian digital cinema, but we should point out some changes in film-making that this film presented in Iranian cinema's move towards digitalization. Firstly, the makers of *Offside* did not have a license to film. Although *Testing Democracy* had no filming licence either, *Offside* was a drama film with a professional crew, and the situation regarding censorship in 2006 was more serious compared to the time of the reformist government in 2000. Secondly, it made a new connection between reality and film by using a real event as the basis of a drama (we will explain this point in the next chapter). Real events were used in part of *Testing Democracy* but it was not a drama like *Offside*. Thirdly, *Offside* won the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival; this resulted in Iranian digital films being recognised and appreciated internationally as serious contributions to the world of cinema beside traditional film-making.

*Night Bus* (2007) is another Iranian film from this period made digitally with an HDV camera by a (nationally) famous Iranian director Kiumars Poorahmad. *Night bus* is about a group of soldiers who have to transport some prisoners of war (POW) from the frontline into the interior during the Iran-Iraq war. The film-maker used the same camera and hand-held method of shooting but the film is in black and white to express a better picture of the past. Although *Night Bus* had a professional crew, the use of a small digital camera give the film-maker an opportunity to work in an enclosed location, such as a bus full of actors, for most of the film and still have sufficient camera movement to follow the exciting storyline. Of course, choosing monochrome colour had some advantage in terms of digital colour grading and recording, and it offset the low resolution and certain technical problems of films recorded onto negative from video at that time in Iran.

I should note here that, despite the famous films made with digital camera before 2007, certain characteristics of that kind of digital camera, particularly to do with lenses, depth of field and resolution, prevented conservative film-makers and even some internationally recognised film-makers such as Majid Majidi from using this new device. However, producers working in mainstream Iranian cinema pushed directors to use digital cameras in order to take

advantage of low-budget film-making although, as Makhmalbaf (2011) claims, some professional actors do not like acting in front of small digital cameras and do not take this device seriously. This transitional period from HDV cameras, which do not make for professional film-making, to fully HD professional cameras such as the Silicon Image 2K (SI2K) and Red, was a critical period in Iranian cinema. We cannot always be sure which projects were made with digital cameras or what kind of digital camera was used for a certain project because producers sometimes hid the production information and claimed that the productions had large budgets in order to take advantage of governmental loans or grab the attention of the market.

*No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009) by Bahman Ghobadi was the first film to be made with the new generation of digital cameras, which can use cinematic lenses of sufficient quality (Aslani, 2011). The film is about an Iranian underground musician who wants to go abroad to perform in a concert. We will discuss this film in detail in the next chapter but we should mention some characteristics of this film in terms of the history of digital film-making in Iran. As Tooraj Aslani, the cinematographer of this film, claims, the first SI2k camera was imported for *No One Knows about Persian Cats* because the film required a small portable camera to take shots in real and small locations; at the same time, the film-maker wanted cinematic lenses for other parts of the film and he did not want to compromise on the quality and resolution of the film. Thus, this was the first time that a film-maker had the opportunity to use a small digital camera, with its mobility and low cost, and at the same time take some artistic and cinematic shots with cinematic lenses. The professional cast and crew working on this project were joined by some non-professional cast members, and the interaction between professional and non-professional actors is one of the special features of this work. This film, which was shown and appreciated at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009, was filmed without a license in Iran and it is one of the very famous films to be made by an independent film-maker in Iran. The distribution of this film on free DVDs in Iran is another characteristic of this film, and we will discuss its place in the history of digital cinema in Iran in the relevant section.

The protests during the 2009 presidential election in Iran affected the making of films with small digital cameras and mobile cameras for a while. Despite the

importance of political and social movements in both governmental and opposition groups, we can find no significant work by famous film-makers in this regard. Thus, the usage of this kind of camera in Iran was restricted to journalism and reports for TV and internet. However, *This Is Not a Film* (2011) by Jafar Panahi and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb was another signpost in Iranian digital cinema and even in the world after that period. As this film is a documentary and has not been categorised in the following chapters but is at the same time an important film in Iranian cinema, we should discuss it here in more detail. *This Is Not a Film* portrays a day in the life of Jafar Panahi, an Iranian film director, during his house arrest to which he was sentenced because of his political activity after the 2009 election. Phillip French (2012) from *The Guardian* believes that the title of Panahi's film was inspired by the surrealist film-maker René Magritte's work, *The Treachery of Image*, in which he shows a pipe and states 'this is not a pipe'. A more logical explanation appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*: "If the government doesn't want him to make a film, he is not going to make one, and he's certainly not going to name any names" (Turan, 2012).

Mirtahmasb (2012), the co-director of this film, claims that he had not originally intended to make a movie. He said that he just wanted to make a documentary series about directors who cannot make films for certain reasons. He felt it important to record this period of silence in Iranian cinema. He asked Panahi for recorded footage from his everyday life at home; when he finally watched this footage, he felt that something was missing and that this footage did not describe the real situation. Thus, they decide to film some more. The structure of the film is created little by little and is based on their real reactions to filming. Mirtahmasb first asked Panahi to read and demonstrate his last script. He tried to read it and explain it but "Finally, Panahi gives up on this tack as well: 'If we could tell a film,' he says in a key line, 'then why make a film?' " (Turan, 2012). Mirtahmasb (2012) claims that, after their disappointment at reading the script, they continued filming for three days. Finally, he had to leave, so they thought about how to end the movie and what would happen if he left. Then they shot the last scenes in two shots lasting around 17 minutes. The whole film was seventy-six minutes long and cost three thousand Euros, which categorized it as a micro budget movie. However, it rated among the top 11 movies of 2012 in

*Sight and Sound* (*Sight & Sound*, 2012), and the scholar and professor of Iranian cinema, Jamshid Akrami, believes that “*This Is Not a Film* is obviously a film, and a very good one at that” (Kohn, 2012).

Mirtahmasb claims that he and Panahi had not done any filming for years and they used their energy in four days of filming in Panahi’s flat. But this was not just an apartment, as the critic Godfrey Cheshire believes: “The fact that the technology allows Panahi to turn himself into a one-man movie studio, something that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago, underscores his isolation” (Kohn, 2012). Of course his situation is accessible to the entire Iranian middle class thanks to the digital era. Mirtahmasb said in his interview with the author that making the film “was like an Iranian music improvisation. We made it with [Sony] Z1 used for filming *Offside* and iPhone”. This allegory can be traced to Naficy’s (2011a) notion about the important role of improvisation in Iranian art and music, which will be explained in the introduction to the third chapter. Cheshire also states: “Panahi appears in the film as himself. So *This Is Not a Film* is the second film in which Panahi has played Panahi, although in the earlier film [*The Mirror* (1997)]he played himself as director” (Kohn, 2012), but in his recent film he acts as himself in everyday life. Thus, *This Is Not a Film* is not a re-experiencing film like *Ten* with an HD camera but is another step towards the freedom of cinema from budgets, actors - even non-professional ones - and stories. I should add that *The Mirror* could not show reality as it happens in everyday life because of the limitation of using a 35 mm camera and its crew.

The whole film was made with a small digital camera and an iPhone. In the part of the film where Panahi talks about the significance of mobile cameras, *This Is Not a Film* shows how digital film-making can cross restricted borders in society and government. It shows that, with these new devices, film-makers are not only unrestricted by censorship but can also make films in very restricted situations such as a jail. Mirtahmasb, who filmed with a digital camera, describes Panahi’s apartment as very hard to film in terms of lighting. Some of it is over-lit and other parts are dark but the result of the film in terms of cinematography was better than expected thanks to the digital camera. A.O. Scot (2012) from the *New York Times* writes “Using modest, ready-to-hand techniques and a format that seems to emphasize the most banal, literal-

minded, artless aspects of picture taking, Mr Panahi has constructed a subtle, strange and haunting work of art.”

The other characteristic of this film was the way in which it was transported to the Cannes Film Festival in 2011. Some reports and articles in newspapers like *The Guardian* stated that the film was smuggled from Iran in a flash memory stick inside a cake (Shoard 2011). Although Mirtahmasb (2012) denied this story in his interview with me, he does not deny transferring the film very easily and without the permission of the government. In fact, exporting films has some rules and regulations, as even DVDs and other discs can be investigated, but the improvement in digital devices and discs gives another kind of freedom to film-makers.

The other point is the way in which Panahi changed his method of directing, from a realist director who relies on the script and his directing to a director who lets reality show itself as it happens in his everyday life, like Kiarostami in *Ten*. In fact *This Is Not a Film* is a return to the early days of digital cinema and films such as *Ten* and *Testing Democracy*, and it shows that the power of the digital camera, like an omnipresent observer, has become stronger and more influential. However, as I mentioned above, it is step forward towards freedom from capital, censorship, script, actors and crew.

I should point out that many other works, apart from these masterpieces, in Iranian cinema and television used various kinds of digital cameras. One example is *Loneliness of Mourning Play Actor*, (2001) made by Alireza Razazifar for IRIB, which used the same techniques and cameras employed by masters such as Makhmalbaf; in this section, however, I will focus on the films and directors who acted as signposts in this history. Progress has been continuous from the first generation of digital cameras until today but the Masters of Iranian cinema act as signposts who have demonstrated these changes; they have great influence on other film-makers as famous directors or internationally recognised persons who draw the attention of international festivals to a different kind of film-making going on in Iran.

In the following parts, I investigate the progress and changes that have taken place in cinematic jobs in Iran during digitalisation. I think Iranian cinema has included artistic careers any of which has had specific reactions to new digital

technology. Some parts of this reaction could be specific to Iranian cinema as a distinguished part of world cinema, and some of them, like other countries' cinemas, were affected by the importing of new technology. The past and future of Iranian cinema is related to the resistance, acceptance and changes that each aspect of cinema has undergone when faced with this new technology. I investigate the reaction of directors (documentary and dramas), editors, cinematographers, sound recorders and sound designers in this regard as the main part of Iranian cinema. Finally I will mention some careers that have emerged thanks to computers in this part of the history of Iranian cinema, such as visual effect supervisors. Furthermore, in investigating this progress and change I try to examine the influence of the computer layer of this new cinema on the cultural layer of Iranian cinema based on Manovich's (2002) notion.

### *Editors and Digital Cinema*

As I mentioned in the first section, editing software and hardware were the first items of digital cinema to come to Iran. Initially, there was resistance to this new technology among editors, and it took time for the traditional editing tables to be removed from offices to archives and museums. Bahram Dehghani (2012), one of the most famous and experienced Iranian editors, believes that the resistance was not strong, but "they did not trust editing by computer" before 2000, although some technicians tried to motivate editors to use it. He believes that "Iranian cinema has not followed industry and technology at all. Iranian cinema has been concerned about concept rather than technology in its history" (Dehghani, 2012). He claims there was resistance concerning sound or other developments in cinema, but digital editing was seen as a problem because the technology introduced to Iran was incomplete. On the one hand, everyone could understand the advantage of editing by computer, while on the other hand everything from graphics to typing and accounting was being done on computers, and computers had become part of human life. However, Hasan Hasandoost (2012), another expert editor, says that "some editors rejected digital editing because film could not be touched and being tangible was very important for them." They touched the film and made marks in pencil on it. Thus, they could feel it and form a kind of relationship with it, but in digital editing everything is virtual.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf (2011) also points out that this emotion is present in old editors even in other countries, adding that some editors could not learn to use computers and this was the end of their careers. Innovative editors such as Makhmalbaf tried to use computers for editing, although others did not trust them. Therefore, he started with Adobe Premiere for some of his digital films such as *Testing Democracy*, but for 35 mm films he also tried a primitive version of Avid that was in the Resane Pooya Institute. As we mentioned in the first section, Resane Pooya was the first company to use digital editing and it motivated film-makers to do likewise although there were problems with software and hardware, as editors such as Dehghani (2012) and Hasandoost (2012) claim. Conservative editors did not find it trustworthy. The main problem occurred in the process of cutting the negative. There were some serious mistakes and differences between computer-edited versions and negatives. These kinds of problems even caused the sound to be designed twice in post-production, as Behnam (2012) claims. On the other hand, the cost of this process was sometimes as much as that involved in working with negatives (Makhmalbaf, 2012). Therefore, the resistance of editors was logical for a while. Educated and experienced editors such as Hasandoost and Mooeini felt that the transition to digital was close but they did not accept incomplete technologies; at the same time, they were looking for adequate replacements. Hasandoost used DPS Velocity to edit *Willow Tree* (a film by Majid Majidi) in 2004. To use this software he used the positive of the rushes for tele-cinema and then used the video for editing. At the end, he edited the positive based on the edited version and sent it to the laboratory. Hasandoost, who edited a documentary video with DPS Velocity before that project, felt that this method was more trustworthy.

However, even conservative editors abandoned traditional Moviola after the introduction of Apple's editing software 'Final Cut' to Iran in 2004. They felt that traditional and analogue editing should give way to digital editing because they see this transition of analogue to digital step by step. Each year they face new hardware and software which solve some previous problems and make the editing process faster and cheaper. However the most trustworthy software was Avid, which was expensive for Iranian cinema; moreover, there were only a few Avid editing suites in Iran, which was inadequate for Iranian cinema



production. Thus, Final Cut was a gift to Iranian cinema. In fact, editors who had assessed the advantages and problems of certain editing software over the years embraced Final Cut, as it solved their previous problems. Thus, we can claim that traditional analogue editing suites became completely obsolete (Dehghani, 2012).

Therefore, after the understandable and short-lived resistance to the new technology, editors accepted digital editing and its consequences. Makhmalbaf (2011) believes that editing and making films by traditional methods are “like the evolution of an embryo”. A film is completed little by little: first the rough cut, then the fine cut, then the sound... and everything is shaped in front of the editor’s eyes step by step. However, in digital editing one can finish a part of a film completely and then work on the next scene or next part and one can examine a lot of experience with that part very rapidly. Some expert editors believe there is no difference between analogue and digital editing in terms of aesthetics. They believe that, regardless of whether a film needs complicated editing, using computer software just helps the editor in terms of time. Otherwise, he/she could do the same editing with traditional methods. However, “digital editing really helps with visual effects, even in cases of simple dissolves” (Dehghani, 2012). Although expert editors such as Dehghani (2012) and Hasandoost (who edited many Iranian masterpieces before and after digitalisation) believe that digital editing cannot reduce the quality of their work and they have the experience and power to control the speed of editing by computer, giving themselves adequate time to think before making any cuts, an overall change in the aesthetics of editing is inevitable.

Hasandoost (2012) believes there is a difference between commercial cinema and artistic cinema regarding new editing technologies in Iran. He claims that commercial cinema and its editors follow the speed of the computer and let it take over their thoughts, whereas editors can control the technology in artistic cinema. He said: “if the time consumed in editing a film was two months for me, after the introduction of digital editing this was reduced to one and a half months, as the technology helped me to avoid wasting time on mechanical work, but it does not reduce the time for thinking about editing” (Hasandoost, 2012). Dehghani (2012) makes the same claims. He adds that digital editing brought two problems for Iranian cinema. First, some directors felt the need to

edit their own work because, on the one hand, they knew the technical issues and, on the other hand, they felt the boring mechanical process was a consequence of the manner of editing. Thus, the Iranian cinema lost its way in favour of a standard cinema in which everyone should work in his/her own field in which he/she is a specialist. Another problem occurs when people who know about computers and editing software try to edit films without having any artistic background and experience. Hasandoost (2012) believes that even people with relevant education should start by editing documentaries for a period of time and then apply to edit cinematic films. However, because of the desires of producers and restricted budgets, we find a group of inexperienced editors working in cinema on the basis of trial and error, reducing the quality of films by their mechanical (rather than artistic) editing.

Dehghani (2012) believes that other changes have occurred in the guild of editing in Iranian cinema that are not necessarily harmful. For example, some talented editors in Iranian cinema have been motivated to work as editors since digitalisation, and they may not have been interested in editing had we still been using boring and time-consuming mechanical editing. He believes that no one will lose their jobs because of digital editing among talented and fresh-minded editors, not even assistants. Editors used, at most, one assistant in Iranian cinema, whereas Hollywood sometimes used as many as five assistants in the past. After the advent of digital editing, the number of assistants was sometimes reduced to one in Hollywood because of the power of computers; in Iran, editors still use one assistant but they prefer to use an assistant who knows about computers and their problems. Makhmalbaf (2011) believes that digital editing grew up in Iran very rapidly compared to other neighbouring countries because Iran has a lot of technicians and computer experts who can support editors. I read these changes in Iranian editing based on Manovich's (2002) idea about the effects of 'computer culture' in this new kind of editing. "In contrast to cinema where most of its 'users' were able to 'understand' cinematic language but not 'speak' it (i.e., make films), all computer users can 'speak' the language of the interface" (Manovich, 2001, p.79). Thus, in digital editing the traditional and expert editors have been faced with a huge number of users capable of working with the software and carrying out mechanical editing. This inspired a kind of fear in the traditional editors about this new role and this new and fast

user-friendly interface. They show this fear when they express their concern about artistic points of editing.

Hasandoost (2012) points out another problem of digital cinema that is not created by editing, although editors must deal with it. Some directors prefer a lot of takes and create a lot of rushes thanks to the cheap price of materials. Sometimes they prefer to take different shots and postpone deliberations about their usage to the editing and post-production stages. Thus, editors are faced with huge volumes of footage for reviewing, choosing and editing. In fact, some directors' planning processes before filming have become weak, and this affects the quality of editing and the film as a whole. In fact, this problem is mainly confined to mainstream cinema but thought is still important in artistic cinema. Some people have become emboldened to make films because of the cheap cost of digital film-making, and this will surely affect and threaten some professional careers, including editors. However, as Dehghani and Hasandoost believe, discipline and thought still predominate in artistic Iranian cinema. They feel that the opportunity to have several views of a film before the final cut without wasting a lot of time on the mechanical process offsets some of the side effects of digital editing. Makhmalbaf (2011), in particular, claims that he appreciates and uses this method of making several edits of a film before making the final decision whereas, using the old method, an editor had to keep each version in his/her mind and then change the material to make another version.

### *Sound and Digital Cinema*

Recording sound during scenes was a new technique in Iranian cinema after the Islamic revolution. In the traditional Iranian cinema, and particularly before the Islamic revolution, dubbing after filming was more common (Delpak, 2012). Thus, we can conclude that sound designing is older and stronger than sound recording. That is why we find two different reactions to digitalisation in these two related guilds of Iranian cinema. For example, Masoud Behnam (2012), one of the pioneers and expert sound engineers, claims he recorded sound with DAT (a kind of Digital Audio Tape recorder) in 1994 to record music, and he believes it was better than professional analogue sound recorders to some

extent. However, he converted his sound designing studio to digital seven years later in 2000.

Digital sound recording started from two points and each of them affects this career in different ways. As the cinema in Iran is affected by the economy, producers sometimes push the technicians towards the use of new devices before they enter professional usage. In the case of sound recording, producers asked sound recordists to use digital devices such as DAT for sound recording because of a shortage of magnetic tapes for the Nagra sound recorders. Although that kind of DAT was not suitable for recording sound in scenes, it was the best choice at that time for some projects (Malakooti, 2012). In fact, recording was easier with digital devices than with analogue tapes, and copying the sound during the editing does not affect the quality of the sound like analogue editing does. However, this advantage attracts some non-professionals and assistants to the industry without having any specialist knowledge, thereby threatening people's careers. As Mehran Malakooti, one of the expert sound recorders claims, with multi-track digital sound recorders, a career seemed easy for some inexperienced assistants because they felt that the special design for recording sound could be ignored by using several wireless microphones for each actor. On the other hand, quality of sound and perspective was ignored by some mainstream producers in Iran for several reasons such as budgets and poor-quality sound systems in cinemas, etc. Another important element that affected sound recordists' careers was digital cameras, which have good-quality sound recording ability, such as the DSR Sony series. Although most of the cameras have just two tracks, these devices were user-friendly, and directors or cinematographers were sometimes tempted to record the sound for documentaries or special films. For example, no one is listed as sound recorder among the crew of *ABC Africa* (2000) and *Ten* (2002). This affects sound designing as well because, as Delpak (2012) claims, Kiarostami asked him to edit and design the sound for *ABC Africa*, but in *Ten* Kiarostami preferred to use just the sound recorded by the camera. Thus, these two changes and developments in digital sound recording in Iran put the sound recordist's career in danger. Malakooti (2012) believes that digital sound recording solved the obvious and major problems of sound recording, and some producers do not distinguish between artistic work and incompetent work in

detail. On the other hand, digitalisation has not taken over Iranian cinema completely and we have not had digital sound playing in cinemas; indeed, people cannot differentiate artistic sound recordings in cinemas. Thus, producers prefer to recruit cheaper sound recorders for films that have no chance of being screened abroad.

In terms of sound editing and design, the changes have been more dramatic compared to other aspects of digital cinema because, in other aspects such as cinematography, technologists tried to reach the standard of 35mm cameras but digital sound designing created a new standard in the film industry itself. On the other hand, the sound editing career was a very old profession in the Iranian cinema, as we have mentioned; thus the resistance to change was more serious, particularly when the experts felt that the new devices did not work properly. I believe that something resembling chaos reigned in sound editing for several years around 2000 in Iran. For example, a famous and expert sound designer, M.R. Delpak, worked with Adobe Perimeter for editing and designing sound (for *ABC Africa*), while others do not accept some sound software that was made for editing sound and generally prefer to work with analogue methods. Furthermore, some sound designers know about technology; for example, Masoud Behnam tried to make his own devices (as he claims, it was like reinventing the wheel) and failed in this experience in 1997. This shows that they are more talented compared to others pursuing this career, but they felt the threat of digitalization and the opportunity it presented, and they wanted to pass this stage without losing their authority in their careers. In fact, two aspects of digital sound editing, even with unprofessional software, were undeniable for conservative sound designers. First, “sound editors can see the sound as well as hear it” (Delpak, 2012). Second, the quality of the sound does not decline during the process from recording until the final copy (Behnam, 2012). However, losing the authority of the expert was inevitable and, thanks to software in PCs, many young inexperienced sound editors started to do this job in the Iranian cinema. This does not mean that sound editing experienced a bad period. If we consider the glass to be half full, some very talented sound designers would never have been attracted to editing and designing sound had the boring and hard analogue method still existed. Although many people

started in this career after the emergence of PC software, a few of them have remained and those are the talented and artistic ones (Malakooti, 2012).

Behnam (2012), who is one of the pioneers and expert sound designers who trained many apprentices and introduced them to cinema, called digital “a syndrome, not a revolution”, and he believes that “it ruins the quality of cinematic work and makes proficiency valueless” (Behnam, 2012) by allowing some inexperienced people to enter this career. Delpak (2012), who edited and designed the sound for some famous digital and analogue films by Abbas Kiarostami and Jafar Panahi, believes that, although digital technology brought a sloppy kind of work to the cinema, “we can gain more experience without consuming more material, and surround sound also obviously helps the artistic part of the work” (Delpak, 2012). He also appreciated editing sound and mixing it on a computer at the same time. But it does not necessarily speed up the process of sound designing, as it is artistic work. He adds that digital sound perhaps helps us to work better on bad films and reduces some problems, but for artistic works and masterpieces the result is the same (Delpak, 2012). This means that sound problems in mainstream cinema have been reduced by digital sound editing due to the capacity of the software to change sound and delete noise, etc.

Thus, on the one hand, although the standard of Iranian mainstream cinema in comparison with Dolby Digital surround sound is still lower, it is much higher than before thanks to digital sound design. Of course, in the case of some masterpieces and artistic works that have the advantage of digital surround sound, Iranian cinema has reached a high standard. On the other hand, the same concern that I found among editors can be found among sound designers regarding the ‘computer interface’ and its interference with artistic and cultural aspects of sound design based on Manovich’s (2002) notion about the interaction between ‘computer layer’ and ‘cultural layer’. In particular, some of them, such as Behnam (2012), frankly express the threat of young inexperienced sound designers as a ‘syndrome’ for artistic sound designing in cinema.

## *Cinematography*

The reaction of Iranian cinema to digital cameras and digital cinematography is more complicated than other aspects of digitalization because this reaction is

related not only to cinematographers but also to directors and Iranian neorealism. In fact, what makes Iranian cinema distinguished among world cinema is its special approach to digital cameras. Indeed, some masters of Iranian cinematography, such as Mahmoud Kalari, who might have been expected to be conservative regarding this new and incomplete technology, were the first group to try to use digital cameras. Although the first movie to be filmed by digital camera was *Moje Morde* (2000) by Hatamikia and the cinematographer M.R. Sokoot, the usage of digital camera by Kalari has had more influence on Iranian cinema because he is now one of the masters of cinematography in Iran. Therefore, when Kalari accepted the DSR PD150 to film *Abadan* and video to film *Boutique* in 2003, the usage of digital cameras became standard in Iranian cinema. Then, laboratories and studios started to find better ways of recording videos on film with government support. Kalari claims that he did not use a 35mm camera in *Boutique* because of the limitations of these cameras and because they needed long takes (ISNA, 2013), but previously he claimed that they used the video format for financial reasons (Rajabiforotan, 2008). There were thus several reasons for using digital cameras, and these reasons are specific to Iranian cinema to some extent. He explains that they filmed *Mainline* (2006) with an HDV camera because much of the film takes place in a car and they needed movement and new angles which a 35 mm camera in Iran did not provide; on the other hand, all the locations and scenes in *Night on Earth* (1991) by Jim Jarmusch are in five taxis in five countries, and this film was made with a 35mm camera. Thus, citing the lack of professional technology, such as cutting a car into two parts, it is just an excuse for using a digital camera, not a real reason (Rajabiforotan, 2008). However, he believes that, in the case of *Offside* (2006), they had to work with HDV because twenty minutes of the film were in the real time of a football match and there was no time to change cassettes or employ a focus puller (Rajabiforotan, 2008).

As I mentioned before, M.R. Sokoot was the first cinematographer to use a digital camera for filming and, as he claims, the result was acceptable for the Iranian cinema of that time; however, there were many problems in working with the Sony DSR series, from quality of picture to depth of field, which make the look of the film different from 35mm works. Therefore, he was not keen to repeat the experience (except for *Saghi*) because the limited ability of the

camera in those days could be considered as reflecting the ability of the cinematographer and his/her taste for artistic work. However, someone such as Kalari, who was at the top of his profession and was recognised as one of the best cinematographers, as indicated by his several prizes from the Fajr International Film Festival, was brave enough to step forward to the frontline of technology. He was sure, on the one hand, that future cameras would be digital and that, on the other hand, no one would attribute the disadvantages of early digital cameras to a lack of skill on his part.

In fact, a new, young generation of cinematographers tried to have their own experience with digital cameras, while the masters and famous cinematographers tried to find a way and lead others toward digitalisation. Tooraj Aslani, the cinematographer of *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009), first used a digital camera and gained new experience in the field of cinematography with Kalari's support. He shot his first digital film *Parvaneha Badraghe Mikonanad* (2002) with a Canon XL1, while most cinematographers who tried using digital cameras used the Sony DSR series. After a few other experiences, he shot *20 Fingers* (2004) which followed *Ten* and was directed by Mania Akbari (who played the main role in *Ten*). This film won the prize for best digital film at the Venice Film Festival in 2004, the first year in which the Venice Film Festival had a competition for digital films (Aslani, 2012).

In fact, the young generation of cinematographers achieved better results by working with digital cameras in comparison with the experienced conservative cinematographers, who were protecting their reputations. Of course, Kalari was an exception. In fact, in the realm of cinematography, Kalari acted like Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf in film-making. He crossed the lines and pushed others to new experiences.

Therefore, we see different trends in the use of digital cameras among different generations of Iranian cinematographers. The masters and older generation (except Kalari) believed that digital cameras caused problems in Iranian cinema. In particular, some of them such as Tooraj Mansoori believed that they produced bad and inartistic films. He believed that using a lot of takes for each shot was one of the problems caused by digital cameras although he appreciated the lighting sensibility of digital cameras and the picture contrast



(Rajabiforotan, 2008). In fact, the older generation criticised the approach of producers to digital cameras rather than the camera itself. Although they accept the new generation of digital cameras such as RED, which was introduced into Iran in 2008, they believe that digital cameras need a different approach and culture of film-making that we do not yet have in Iran, but producers simply like to replace 35mm cameras with digital ones for financial reasons.

There is a middle generation of film-makers who knew cinema and video in the past and gained some experience of it by supporting famous directors and producers, but they do not like to work on the frontline and lose their reputations. They have been waiting for the complete generation of digital cameras and the time when they will completely take over the cinema. They believe the shortage of finance and equipment caused the use of digital camera in Iran, but nowadays the technological demands and advantages of these kinds of cameras have become the main reason for using them. Thus, the best Iranian cinematographers were working with them in 2011 (Sokoot, 2012). However, the talented younger generation of Iranian cinematographers have a different approach to digital cameras. Some of them such as Tooraj Aslani have never worked as assistants and they have tried to follow the technology for new experience. They even worked with 35mm cameras like digital cameras. In fact, they created the demand for digital cameras before they appeared (Aslani, 2012). This means they attempted to work with natural light in small locations in front of non-professional actors with 35 mm cameras, and they found there was a shortage of analogue devices for this kind of film-making. This generation were moving between digital cameras and 35mm cameras by introducing full HD cameras. Tooraj Aslani claims: “when I saw the result of my cinematography for *Lonely Tune of Tehran* in Cannes Film Festival 2008, my entire bond with 35mm camera was broken” (Aslani, 2012). He believes the 35mm camera was the biggest obstacle in Iranian cinema because it belongs to industrial cinema but Iranian cinema is not industrial. It is independent cinema, which needs light and flexible equipment. “Usage of 35mm camera is like buying a cow for drinking a cup of milk” (Aslani, 2012). They also believe that digital cinema in Iran saves on human resources as well as equipment. In particular regard to health and safety, the digital cameras, which used electronic cranes and some smaller and safer grips, have had a considerable effect in

saving technicians' and crew members' lives. Moreover, the small and portable digital cameras helped the Iranian cinema to break certain clichés regarding locations and movements (Aslani, 2012). Using different angles and small locations, which we will discuss in the next chapter, is another advantage of digital camera for young cinematographers who are trying to break the clichés.

In fact, some characteristics of Iranian digital cinema appear in the work of cinematographers such as Aslani in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009) and *Farewell Baghdad* (2010). This shows that digital cameras can provide different advantages in different genres. For example, in *Farewell Baghdad* directed by Mehdi Gholami the digital camera helps to represent New York and Iraq near Tehran, while in realistic social films such as *No One Knows about Persian Cats* digital cameras help to paint a better and more natural and truthful portrait of society and the atmosphere of Tehran. The movement that started with film-makers such as Makhmalbaf and Kiarostami and cinematographers such as Kalari in 2000 continues with the work of young film-makers such as Ghobadi and cinematographers such as Aslani. Although digital cameras arriving in Iran soon changed, film-makers and cinematographers have even taken advantage of non-professional cameras to make artistic films. *Rhino Season*, which was filmed by Aslani in 2011, is the first film to be shot with a photography camera. The film was made with a Canon D5 mark II and cinematic lenses. These kinds of experiences are continuing. For example, Aslani used the same photography camera with photography lenses in *Boghaz* (2012). He used this kind of lens, with its problems in focusing, to demonstrate the point of view of drug-addicted people.

In fact, while the conservative, older generation of Iranian cinematographers have been concerned about the lack of perfect quality, which was not provided by cinematic lenses and depth of field until 2008, the new generation of cinematographers has been born with the support of expert pioneers and masters of Iranian neorealism, such as Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf, and expert cinematographers such as Kalari.

A group of expert cinematographers initiated the use of digital cameras with SI2K, which have been introduced to Iran by the new generation, such as Aslani, since 2008. Although the SI2K overcame some of the problems of the

early digital cameras, cinematographers were still not completely satisfied with the lenses and quality. The main problem in terms of quality related to the lack of good film recorders in Iran at that time (Rajabiforotan, 2008).

Since 2010, with the importation of professional digital cameras that record film in RAW format (such as RED and Alexa), the equipping of laboratories with a new generation of film recorders and scanners, and colour grading of digital intermediate, resistance to digital cameras has weakened considerably, and even very conservative cinematographers use them in their films with the help of technicians (Bashirzadeh, 2012).

Despite the acceptance of digital cameras around 2010 by most cinematographers in Iran, their attitudes to this kind of cinematography vary greatly. Sometimes, one can find completely different ideas about lighting. This indicates that they may be talking about two different things in regard to digital cameras or that they do not completely understand this phenomenon and consequently have paradoxical ideas about it. A panel of expert Iranian cinematographers taking part in a governmental workshop in 2008 displayed these complex attitudes (Rajabiforotan, 2008). For example, the negative attitude of Tooraj Mansoori, an expert Iranian cinematographer, about using several takes was criticized by Azarshahab, a young international Iranian cinematographer, who explains this phenomenon as characteristic of this kind of cinema. Furthermore, when Kalari discussed digital cinema as someone who uses different kinds of digital cameras in internationally recognised Iranian films, it was different from Mansoori, who accepts the SI2K as digital camera. In particular, when they compare the cost of film-making and lighting with digital film-making, this difference becomes clearer (Rajabiforotan, 2008). According to this panel and other interviews with Iranian cinematographers, some Iranian cinematographers are searching for a 35mm digital camera in terms of size. For these cinematographers, the perfect digital camera should be like a 35mm camera but should use a hard disc instead of film. However, cinematographers such as Kalari and Aslani recognize digital cameras as practical new devices for a closer approach to the real world or to make more realistic fiction. In other words, they accept it as a new medium and its consequences in terms of the changes it offers to cinema and its logic.

It is a fact that cinematographers have been frustrated by the incomplete technology of digital cameras in Iran and the lack of knowledge, which has caused them to view the 35mm as more reliable. Every year since 2000, a merchant or film office in Iran has imported and introduced a new camera (and sometimes a new system) to Iranian cinema and has claimed it to be the best one ever. They claim that the cameras are a real rival for the 35mm camera, and a large part of the Iranian cinema has been encouraged to buy them and use them in professional work. However, problems have arisen with these devices, and each year the same scenario has been repeated (Salami, 2012). Salami, a young and recognised cinematographer who claims to have worked with most models of digital camera from 2000, remembers that, when merchants tried to sell the SI2K to Iranian producers, they claimed that *Slum Dog Millionaire* had been made with this camera. However, after encountering problems with this camera, they discovered that just a few parts of that movie were made with this camera for a certain purpose. Thus, the use of digital cameras in Iran became a fashion (Salami, 2012).

Almost all cinematographers claim that the script and the vision of the director inspire them to use digital cameras, but no one denies the role of finance in this regard, not even Kalari. Pooresmaeili (2012), a cinematographer and tutor of cinema, explains cinematographers' preference for digital cameras in Iran in terms of four factors. He mentioned light as the most important factor, followed by the mobility of the camera, particularly the hand-held method (Aslani explains this as different or artistic decoupage). The third factor is the demand for a closer approach to the real world, which digital cameras provide by not disturbing the atmosphere with lighting and equipment. We can point to this factor as the immediacy and intimacy of new media, with reference to Bolter and Grusin (2002). The final factor is the opportunity to use professional and complete post-production facilities such as colour grading or visual effects, which can offset certain problems and shortages that occur during filming.

In fact, there are major and minor issues with digital cinematography that concern different types of cinematographers more and affect their careers in the digital area. Some masters such as Kalari criticise digital cameras for being an "irritating intelligence that stopped cinematographers from doing what they wanted by trying to correct them" (ISNA, 2012). This shows the psychological

dependence of old cinematographers on film and the nostalgic feelings for analogue cinema. In other words, as Pooresmaeili (2012) claims, “negatives give one more opportunity to think about aesthetics than digital film”. But it is not just a nostalgic feeling. Something unpleasant has occurred in the guild of cinematography because of a lack of regulation, which put careers in danger, both artistically and financially. As Sokoot (2012) claims, many young people entering the market merely know how to work with the devices and have no artistic talent or experience. They charge rates as low as one fifth of professional rates, and some producers who do not care about artistic aspects of the work choose them instead of professionals. Thus, we can see the concern over the negative effects of the user-friendly interfaces of digital cinema again, in terms of cinematography. In fact, all the cinematographers who were interviewed emphasised this problem but some of them believe there may be some fresh and talented cinematographers entering the guild thanks to the new devices. They understand the situation of Iranian cinema in Iran and the world. They know there are just a few old and out-dated analogue laboratories in Iran, and even film-makers who work with 35mm film prefer to scan films and do colour grading and film effects in digital intermediate before recording the final film on 35mm. On the other hand, Iranian cinema is recognised for its independent artistic films, and digital camera is more compatible with the artistic desires of film-makers, such as hand-held movements (Sokoot, 2012).

### *Visual Effects Supervisors*

Although digital visual effects came to the Iranian cinema very early, in 1993, their progress was very slow compared to another aspects of digital cinema. As we mentioned before, the first acceptable digital visual effect was applied in 2003; thereafter, few changes occurred, compared to the progress in cinematography and other aspects, until 2010 in big budget films such as *Kingdom of Solomon* (2010), which was made with the help of international visual effects supervisors. I will discuss visual effects in the Iranian cinema in a separate chapter on the future of digital cinema in Iran, but I should mention here the history of this guild in Iran and its problems, which hindered the progress of this aspect of digital cinema in Iran.

The common problem of digital cinema and digital special effects in particular is the lack of technology. Unoriginal software and the lack of fast and developed computers for rendering slowed down the progress of digital special effects in Iran for a while. "The technicians who used crack version of special effects software psychologically did not try to achieve the best performance from them because they did not pay for it" (Tavakolifarsani, 2012). Thus, there are many technicians who only partially know about certain software. On the other hand, there is no reliable institute to teach them. Finally, poor internet connections prevented them from obtaining information from abroad (Tavakolifarsani, 2012). Another big problem is the lack of teamwork between technicians. Tavakolifarsani (2012), who is one of the pioneers of this profession in Iran and who started work in 1991 with very basic computers, claims that there is just a small group of professional visual effects technicians, and that most technicians prefer to work individually and thus do not support big projects. He believes Dr Motamedi is an exception, as he has built a team and works on big projects as visual effects supervisor. However, Motamedi (2012) complains about the financial problems of this guild in Iran. In fact, film-makers' expectations of visual effects are sometimes unrealistic and misplaced, and this hinders the progress of digital effects (Tavakolifarsani, 2012). Some big budget projects have made considerable usage of visual effects in Iranian cinema since 2010 but most of these were made with the help of foreign technicians or laboratories. Motamedi (2012) named *Kingdom of Solomon* (2010), *The Maritime Silk Road* (2011) and the recent, unfinished film by Majid Majidi among these projects. Nevertheless, we can see progress in the quantity and quality of visual effects applied in films. For example, in *Thirteen Cats on the Roof* (2003) just 13 minutes of visual effects were applied, but in *Maritime Silk Road* (2011) 105 shots have visual effects (VFX), while in *33 Days* (2012) visual effects are used in 398 shots, as well as realistic animation or CGI (Computer Generated Images). Unlike other guilds of the cinema, the visual effects guild seems to be suffering from a lack of fresh and talented people who are educated in this field (Motamedi is a medical doctor who learned VFX for himself).

### *Short Films and the New Generation*

As Shahab Razavian (2012), a recognised director and scholar of Iranian cinema, believes, the Iranian digital cinema is rooted in the culture of short films

that were made in Iran. It began in 1969 (before the Islamic Revolution) with the establishment of the Free Iranian Cinema (Cinema Azad-e Iran). This movement was continued by the government, and the Iranian Youth Cinema Society was established in 1974 when considerable Super 8 cameras were imported to Iran. At the same time, a centre for making short films in The Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents (an Iranian governmental cultural institute) was also established. Most of these institutes have been continuing their activities since the Islamic republic was founded, and the government has tried to develop and increase the number of branches of Iranian Youth Cinema Society around the country. In fact, these institutes and their students are the foundation of independent film-making, which has embraced digital cameras and editing. Razavian (2012), who is the founder and a member of the board of directors of the Iranian Short Film Society, believes that digital film-making came to Iran gradually and logically based on this background. In the 1990s, the Super 8 camera was replaced by video cameras in the short film institutes of Iran, and this was the beginning of digital film-making, which came to Iran in the new century.

In fact, the demand and enthusiasm for film-making was older than the equipment. Thus, after the introduction of cheap digital cameras, this desire was released, with the making of many short films all over Iran. The number of short films registered for the Iranian Short Film Festival rose from 400-1000 films a year before 2000 to 4000-8000 films in recent years thanks to digital film-making facilities (Razavian, 2012). In fact, digital film-making has increased the number of short films considerably and made the film-makers more independent. Razavian as an expert and a jury member of some short film festivals believes that just ten per cent (or less) of film-makers who apply to the Short Film Festival are funded by the government, which shows that the government has lost control over the making of short films and that anyone who has a computer and can rent a camera for a few days can demonstrate his/her ideas in a short film. However, Pooresmaeili (2012), who is on the board of directors of the Iranian Short Films Society, believes that the side effects of this phenomenon are worse than the benefits it provides for short films. He claims that the value of short films is declining due to the huge increase in the number of short films, which are being made by ordinary people who know nothing

about film and visual communication. He believes the making of a short film is a consequence of thought, not modern equipment. Of course, anyone who has a good idea can make a film with a little training, but the increasing number of incompetent films damages the personality of people who claim to be film-makers, as well as the integrity of their ideas. He believes that digital equipment is damaging the reputation of short films.

However, there are some film-makers who started off by making digital short films and are now recognised film-makers in Iran, such as Shahram Mokri and Ramtin Labafi (Razavian 2012). We cannot say that, without digital cameras, they would not have become film-makers, but we can see the importance and influence of digital cameras in their short films. They understand the capability of the equipment. In fact, digital film-making shapes their work and consequently their characters as film-makers (Pooresmaeili 2012).

### *Documentary Film-making*

Alireza Ghasemkhan (2012), a scholar and former director of Cinema Tec and the Iranian Documentary Film-makers' Association, believes that cinema started in Iran with the documentaries by Ebrahim Khan Akasbashi more than a century ago, but most of the time it was under the control of kings and governments because of the shortage of equipment and material; thus, Iranian documentary film-makers were looking for solutions. Some experts and former presidents of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers' Association such as Ebrahim Mokhtari (2012) and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb (2012) also believe that the idea of digital documentary film-making preceded the introduction of digital devices to Iran. Mirtahmasb, co-director of *This Is Not a Film*, claims that some cultural activities such as Cinema Tec shows introduced the documentaries of film-makers such as Ross McElwee to Iranian documentary film-makers and raised interest in independent documentary film-making. Meanwhile, Mokhtari (2012), the master of Iranian documentary film-making and founder of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers' Association, believes that the desire to obtain devices such as digital cameras had been generated as soon as film-makers like him started to look at "events as sacred affairs". He believes his film *Tenancy* (1980) was made like a digital film without fear of shortage of material or limitation of censorship. He claims that a governmental foundation covered all his expenses



for filming by providing a lot of negative, and it asked him to show what he saw in the real world about the problems of tenancy after the Islamic revolution, with the film to be shown to the Iranian parliament. Thus, he felt what the digital documentary film-maker feels regarding freedom from capital and censorship. After tasting this freedom, he continued his career by making films by video cameras; this freed him from concerns about shortage of material and enabled him to take many lengthy shots. Thus, he believes that some old documentary film-makers dreamed of having digital cameras and made many plans for them.

Of course, Razavian's idea about the foundation of digital short films may be true of young digital documentary film-makers because some short films made in short film institutes were documentaries or docudramas (Mokhtari, 2012). Thus, digital documentary film-making rapidly found its human resources among young film-makers.

As we mentioned earlier, the first digital cameras may have been brought to Iran by war documentary film-makers, but the social film-makers looked forward to this light and powerful device.

After the Islamic Revolution, most documentary films made in Iran and supported by the government were about war or religious subjects, but digital cameras gave film-makers an opportunity to go into society and capture the real social world and its problems. Documentary film-makers had planned for this moment and were waiting for it. They had many ideas that could not be filmed on celluloid; therefore, they embraced the new devices and accepted their consequences (Mirtahmasb, 2012). At the same time, digital cameras introduced new subjects and new ideas, particularly among the new generation of film-makers. As Mirtahmasb believes, for documentary film-makers the first priority is the subject, followed by the aesthetic aspect. On the other hand, a group of journalists entered the realm of film-making with a special attitude to events. Thus, there were many subjects that could not be explored without a quick and small digital camera. Hence, the idea of Mokhtari (the event as a sacred affair) found its importance in practice. The whole of society and the real world became a subject for film-makers. In the pre-digital era, most documentaries took a dramatic approach and did not explore reality too deeply, but the new film-makers simply restructured the form. They realised that they

should not sacrifice the event for their ideas or aesthetics (Mokhtari, 2012). As Mokhtari (2012) claims, they can capture the whole event and find the aesthetic in it, which is compatible with the reality of the event shown by the power of the digital camera. This means that the art of the documentary can be more complex with digital cameras.

Because of what digital devices offer, the number of digital film-makers in Iran increased for a while. The Iranian Documentary Film-makers' Association was established with seventy-five pre-digital documentary film-makers in 1997. From 2005 till 2009 its membership increased from 150 to nearly 400, while more than 2000 other film-makers were waiting to be honoured with membership. However, this trend stopped in June 2009 due to political problems related to the presidential election in Iran (Mirtahmasb 2012). Mirtahmasb claims (based on what he found out from documentary film festivals in 2011) that 2000 documentaries are made in Iran every year exclusive of those made by National TV and some recognized film-making organisations that are dependent on the government. Surprisingly, seventy per cent of these documentaries were self-financed and independent. Tahami Nejad, an expert old master of documentary film-making said that, during the pre-digital film-making period, when a film-maker found a subject in Bashagard (a remote village in the desert of Iran), he had to stay there for a few months for research and then had to go to Tehran to find a producer; a year later, he could make his film. However, this village now has four film-makers (Mirtahmasb, 2012). In fact, digital film-making is most effective in documentaries but experts assess this effect differently.

In fact, as Mirtahmasb (2012) and Ghasemkhan (2012) claim, the events related to the presidential election in June 2009, which lasted until the end of that year, were the turning point in the trend of digital documentary progress in Iran. The social and political movement of middle-class Iranians in 2009, called the Green Movement by the opposition and *Fetnah* (sedition) by the government, was a phenomenon that revealed the weakness of digital documentary film-makers compared to digital social media, which was involved in this movement, as Ghasemkhan (2012) believes. He also points out the famous letter by documentary film-makers to the government in 2009 complaining about censorship and being banned from making films. He criticizes that letter, saying "who can ban the small digital camera and mobile

camera from capturing documentary evidence of what ordinary people do at social events?” (Ghasemkhan 2012) Ghasemkhan, a scholar and member of the board of directors of the Documentary Film-makers Association, believes that documentary film-makers suffer from lack of knowledge about digital media and that ideas are spread through digital media rather than censorship. We can point to recognized digital documentaries made during the Arab Spring such as *Shouting in Darkness* (2011) by May Ying Welsh and *Tahrir* (2011) by Stefano Savona but we can find no documentaries about the events in Iran in 2009 which used the whole power of the digital media and the omnipresent small digital camera and ‘mobile camera’. I mentioned several characteristics about the documentary *Shouting in Darkness* (2011) made by Aljazeera in an article named “Conflict Omnipresent Witness” at the Media And Conflict Interchange 2012 at the University of Bradford. For example, understanding the power of the small digital camera and the mobile camera as an omnipresent witness, as Kiarostami (2004) believes, and capturing the whole event as a sacred thing, as Mokhtari (2012) believes, are not ignored in that documentary, but we can find no documentaries like that in Iran in 2009. Another point worth mentioning is peer production in digital media, which was ignored in documentary films during this period in Iran. This means that we rarely find a documentary in which a bunch of film-makers have used different sources and different media, from digital media to mass media, to make a film that shows different aspects of an event. On the other hand, digital documentaries can offer people the ability to share their voices and ideas, and this enhances the reliability of these media and helps their distribution among people after production. *Green Days* (2009) By Hana Makhmalbaf and *The Green Waves* (2010) by Ali Ahadi Samadi both suffer from same problem in this regard. Although they used some digital sources, they damaged the value of the documentary by using dramatic themes and animation. In fact, the animation and dramatic parts questioned the validity of other sources and made it look like propaganda rather than a film about a real event and based on truth.

Thus, independent digital documentary film-making entered a depression and a period of inactivity after 2009, particularly social documentaries. While the documentary film-makers blamed the government and military and security forces for this situation, scholars such as Ghasemkhan (2012) believe that this

was not a valid excuse and that the main reason for this slump was lack of ideas and proficiency in working with digital media. Also, Mirtahmasb (2012), although believing that the government hindered the making of documentary films, claims that there is no excuse for anyone not making documentaries with powerful digital cameras nowadays.

To sum up, documentary films and the number of film-makers have increased since the introduction of digital devices in terms of quantity except during the period around 2009. This situation brought some advantages and disadvantages in terms of the quality of films, and it had some consequences for the guild of documentary film-makers.

Professional film-makers usually complain about the lack of professionalism, experience and thought among film-makers brought up with digital cameras in all fields, from sound to cinematography and editing. Naser Safarian (2012), Mokhtari (2012) and Ghasemkhan (2012), who has been in charge of the board of directors of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers' Association since 2000 for periods of time and assesses new films and new applicants, believe that a group of people called themselves professional film-makers and applied for membership of the Association, but their work was awkward. Safarian (2012), an expert recognised documentary film-maker, claims that, before digital cameras, a film-maker applied for membership with three documentaries that they had made over several years, but now many people turn up with more than ten films, none of which deserve to be called professional work. He also mentioned some individuals who made very good documentaries that won a lot of international prizes but who then disappeared. For example, Ghasemkhan (2012) points to Soodabeh Babagar and her film *Keshti-e Nooh* (2004), which went to many festivals; since then, she does not seem to have made any more films. It seems that she just grabbed an idea with a digital camera and then quit film-making. Mokhtari (2012) states frankly that many people are motivated or tempted by digital devices to make a film; however, after their first experience, few of them have remained in this field. Safarian (2012) explains that just ten per cent of digital documentary film-makers who are members of the Association are making recognised and artistic films. As the Association is part of the documentary film-maker population, he claims that perhaps just two per cent of digital documentaries are of the same high quality of documentaries in

the pre-digital age. However, Mirtahmasb (2012) and Safarian (2012) both believe that we cannot assess the quality of digital film-making in a short time and that we should wait and assess it in the future after the first waves of the digital movement have calmed down.

Ghasemkhan (2012) believes that a lack of governmental supervision and control have caused chaos and resulted in incompetent films being made by young film-makers in the digital age. He claims that when young film-makers lose the governmental management they lose their self-management as well. In fact, digital devices help them to film without planning or to make plans without thinking them through. In particular, when they are acting as 'solo film-makers' and want to be cinematographer, sound recorder, writer and director with the help of digital devices, they are missing out on the thoughts and ideas of others. Thus, he believes that digital film-making since 2000 has damaged the artistic aspects and proficiency of documentary film-making in Iran.

Mokhtari (2012) points out the role of festivals run by IRIB in supporting and encouraging film-makers to make documentary films after the advent of the digital cinema. I would also mention that festivals such as Kish Documentary Film Festival, Cinema Haghighat Film Festival, and the Documentary section of Fajr International Film Festival, which is run by the government, accepted digital works and encouraged film-makers to make documentaries. The Kish Documentary Film Festival, which started in 1999, showed documentaries made on video, and the first long documentary made by digital camera and directed by Delara Karkheiran won the first prize in 1998. This was the first time that film-makers such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Jafar Panahi, who were on the jury of this Festival, were faced with a feature-length film made with a small digital handy-cam, and they were impressed by the light sensibility and quality of the picture as well as its risky social subject (Mokhtari, 2012). The Fajr International Film Festival has had a documentary section since 2001 and showed feature-length digital video documentaries for the first time. Finally, the *Cinema Vérité* (Haghighat) Film Festival has been staged since 2008 as the biggest documentary film festival in Iran. In fact, the Government tries to manage the films indirectly and tries to define a standard for documentary films although, in a semi-closed country such as Iran, forbidden elements of reality, such as corruption and poverty, are more attractive subjects for documentary

film-makers. On the other hand, it seems some foreign festivals are eager to show these kinds of product. Ghasemkhan (2012) believes that foreign international festivals corrupt documentary film-making in Iran because they have a different attitude to human beings and nature, and young film-makers try to adopt this notion to gain international recognition. Thus, native documentary film-making and the true presentation of society and culture have failed for the sake of gaining admission to international festivals.

In most of the professional guilds named in previous sections, digital cameras have caused damage in terms of markets and business since 2000, but Mirtahmasb (2012) believes that digital cinema has had the opposite effect on documentary film-makers. He claims that documentary film-making was not an independent job in the pre-digital period in Iran, but now young film-makers work and earn money as documentary film-makers. A new generation of film-makers has emerged in Iran who call themselves documentary film-makers whereas, before the digital age, most documentary film-makers were staff members of TV channels or worked in other guilds of professional dramatic cinema. Also, the documentary provided a way of moving on to professional cinema and making drama, but today we see documentary film courses in some film schools in Iran, and students who attend these courses intend to become documentary film-makers. This shows that the introduction of digital cinema to the realm of the documentary has made the latter more pragmatic and more attractive. This change has occurred because of the power of digital devices, which offer a better connection to the real world and enable film-makers to capture whole events and shape them in a way that seems trustworthy and believable. Thus, the audience feels as though it is in the middle of an event. This was the gift that the older generation of documentary film-makers such as Mokhtari had been looking for.

### *Studios and Equipment*

The technological equipment used in the early days of Iranian cinema was introduced and imported to Iran from Western countries. Therefore, the merchants and people involved in the technical side of this business, such as the owners of studios and equipment, have interacted with the development of these devices from abroad and the demand of film-makers in Iran. On the other

hand, they have faced the opportunities and threats involved in working and trading in a country in the shadow of war and sanctions.

Merchants such as Soori (2012) and Mostafavi (2012), who were pioneers in importing digital devices, claim that the trading and selling of digital equipment has been a profitable business for them. Soori (2012) claims to know the market and that the cinema and TV industry knows him. Thus, the merchants not only retained their old market and customers by introducing digital devices but also found more customers among the amateurs who are interested in cheap and light digital equipment. Soori (2012) also mentioned the huge profits that the introduction of small and popular digital cameras such as the DSR-PD150 and 170 Sony has brought them since 2002. However, some professional cinematographers are wary of this process of trading. We mentioned Salami's (2012) claims that he was deceived by businessmen and encouraged to buy an uncompleted model of camera. Bashirzadeh (2012), a cinematographer and owner of a rental company, also claims that the lack of knowledge among professional film-makers and technicians causes many misunderstandings and problems when buying or renting equipment. However, the most common problems relate to the professional and semi-professional devices used for feature films, such as HD cameras and the 4k camera. In fact, two different groups of users have been buying and renting digital devices since 2002 when digital cameras and digital editing became popular. The first group consists of professional people who wish to take advantage of cheap digital devices to make professional films; the second group comprises amateurs who wish to buy an opportunity to make a film or run a small film-making business for documentaries or weddings etc. In fact, the latter, who are new customers of this market, have played a big role in the survival and development of this business, and they do not have great expectations of digital devices, unlike the professionals. Therefore, the increase in the purchasing of digital editing computer boards in 1998 (Ahmadi, 2012) followed by the introduction of the DSR-PD150 in 2002 and the HDV cameras in 2005 (Soori, 2012) could be related to this group of amateur customers. However, the professionals always look for completed models of digital camera and devices.

As Mohammad Heydarian (2012), former deputy of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry for cinematic affairs, claims, the government has supported

the studios and film-makers in importing new, professional digital devices, which were expensive. In fact, professional cinema cannot survive and develop without the support of the government. However, this kind of support has mainly extended to post-production equipment such as sound studios, film printers and scanners, and it was provided when government felt that this change to digital cinema was inevitable; on the other hand, great demand for these facilities emerged due to the large volume of work being done with digital cameras. The government believed that there was no need to support the importing of digital cameras because private companies could handle it themselves. After the introduction of the HD digital camera and professional cameras with 2k resolution, such as the SI2K in 2007, the business surrounding digital films in terms of studios and equipment changed. The demand for digital devices and the standardisation of Iranian cinema forced the government to set up workshops and seminars in 2008. The office for the development of cinematic technology in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance conceded the need to import HD cameras that were compatible with cinematic lenses, standard editing systems, standard sound design with a Dolby Digital license and, finally, laser film recorders (Rajabiforotan, 2008). That was a good start for the development of the industry although it was very general and overlooked digital colour grading and scanners; in practice, however, the development proceeded with the support of the government. For example, Pishgaman Cinema Aria (supported by the Kamarani Foundation, one of the oldest and biggest private film companies) started to complete the process of digital intermediate (DI) in 2008; by 2009, they had scanners, Arri laser printers, and software and hardware for colour grading (Sedghi, 2012). Shidrang (2012), one of the managers of the Kamarani Foundation, claims that, after finishing the DI process, the studio was always fully booked up due to the demand of Iranian cinema. Bashirzadeh (2012) believes that, although other companies started to provide scanners, film recorders and digital colour grading in 2012, the demand of Iranian cinema still outstrips this supply. He claims that Iranian cinema suffers from a lack of digital knowledge rather than a lack of digital technology. He mentions the Alexa camera, which he rents to cinematographers even though some of them do not know how to use all the capabilities of this camera. The Iranian cinema is prepared for 2k shooting, editing and screening; thus 4K quality is something of a luxury for this cinema in 2012 and beyond. However,



Behnam (2012), the owner of Bahaman Studios, believes that we have been able to provide and support digital sound design here with international quality since 2010, possibly because of government support for digital sound before digital pictures. In fact, it could have decided to support digital sound equipment in 2000 (when it would have been forced to send the films abroad for digital sound design, which was needed for world exhibition), but it was not until 2004 that the government decided to support digital work and allow digital film-makers to become part of the Iranian cinema (Heydarian, 2012).

To sum up, the business around digital cinema has two aspects for merchants and studio owners. The side of digital cinema that is connected to amateurs, young people and artists has increased since 2000 and has accelerated with the introduction of DV, HDV and, finally, HD cameras in 2012. This part of the business suffers from lack of standard quality and process, but studios and merchants working in this area claim to have derived considerable benefits because this part did not belong to the traditional cinema market but has since added to it. Even in the case of amateur film-making and short films, production has increased considerably during this time, and underground film-making and music videos have opened up a new perspective for this business. However, the professional side is waiting for the support of the government in order to develop. As many professionals claim in these interviews, the Iranian cinema relies on governmental support as it is not an economically viable industrial cinema. Therefore, the progress of professional Iranian digital cinema has been slower than that of other parts. Although the government spends a considerable amount on some big-budget films with high-quality special effects, the budget for the digital aspects of these projects is still lower than for other aspects of the film. We will discuss this further in the fourth chapter.

### *Directing in Iranian Digital Cinema*

Digital film-making has had a great impact on master directors as well as on young and new-generation directors. In the next chapter we investigate some of the masters of Iranian cinema and their approach to digital film-making in detail but we should first mention the trend of digital film-making among directors in the Iranian cinematic context in general.

We can divide the approach of directors to digital film-making or digital devices into two categories. The first contains the directors who like to make 35 mm films with digital cameras. In other words, they are just looking for cheaper and easier film-making with their pre-digital ideas. The second category contains the directors who recognise and appreciate digital film-making and are trying to make different films with the new devices.

In 2001, Ebrahim Hatamikia became the first famous Iranian director to make a cinematic film with a digital camera. *Moje Morde* (2001) is in entirely the same genre in which Hatamikia usually works, and it uses the same methods he normally employs to make his films. The main reason why the director decided to use digital devices was the lack of budget and sufficient equipment for filming at sea (Sokoot 2012). Another early digital film by a professional director was *Saghi* (2001) by M.R. Alami; again the budget was the main reason for using digital devices. Although these were unique experiences for the directors in making feature films with digital cameras (until the latest generation of 4k camera), many directors attempted to make movies with the DVCAM and HD purely because of financial pressure. In fact, the making of these kinds of movies, which suffered from weak aesthetic qualities, such as the difficulty of shooting in deep focus with digital devices, started in 2001 and has continued to the present day. This does not mean that all of these movies are worthless and suffer from lack of artistic quality.

During the 2000s and before the introduction of professional and cinematic digital cameras, most good directors had experience of working with digital cameras although they consider their work Tel-Films rather than cinematic movies. We can mention Dariush Mehrjuei and Mohammad Ali Sajadi among these professionals, as well as many young directors. The Deputy of the Minister of Culture for cinematic affairs claims that the quantity and quality of these kinds of movies forced the government to create a new section in the Fajr International Film Festival for them, and after a while some of them were accepted as cinematic movies in the main section of the Film Festival over the next few years (Heydarian, 2012). On the one hand, some recognised directors who attempted to make their cinematic scripts with digital cameras did not expect to receive funding for their ideas, and they felt that the idea and story were more important than the visual aspects. On the other hand, some young

directors, in order to escape the bureaucratic procedure of making their first films and reduce the financial risk, also chose digital cameras for their films; then, after finishing the productions, they applied to change them to cinematic works by gaining admission to the Fajr International Film Festival or a recognized international festival abroad. IRIB has a considerable role in supporting directors who want to make films with digital cameras, as their scripts are approved by IRIB and are congruous with its cultural goals. In fact, directors who work for IRIB are not concerned about the box office. Thus, they could potentially use artistic techniques and non-professional actors.

However, in practice IRIB and, in particular, Sima Film (the part of IRIB that is in charge of making Tel-Films) has its own rules, and it requires movies that are attractive for the TV audience as well (Rezadad, 2012). This means that the quantity of digital films made for the TV industry is no measure of their artistic quality. We rarely find films produced for TV that are recognized as genuine cinematic work, such as *Night Bus* (2007) by Kiumars Pourahmad, an old expert Iranian director. In other words although the IRIB has introduced and supported many directors in the cinema, the cinema does not accept them as real directors with all the qualifications of the previous generation of directors. However, they used the digital films and videos they made as certificates and experience of their work in a real cinematic context. Of course, this is not limited to digital films, because TV introduced many nationally and internationally recognised directors to the cinema, such as Jafar Panahi and Asghar Farhadi etc.

The second group of directors who used digital cameras are more internationally recognised than the first group. We can name Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Jafar Panahi, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Bahman Ghobadi, Mani Haghighi and other film-makers in this regard. They considered digital cameras and digital film-making as different devices for making the kind of films they could not make in Iran with the 35 mm devices. They tried to return to the 'early days of cinema', as Kiarostami (Kiarostami, 2004) claims, or to 'real author cinema', as Makhmalbaf (2012) believes. Then, some of them tried to connect with the real world in a different way or to apply the new techniques and movements, which is hard to achieve in the Iranian traditional cinema context.

As we discussed in previous sections, Abbas Kiarostami can be considered a pioneer of this kind of approach to digital film in Iran. After *ABC Africa* (2001), a documentary that he made with the first generation of small digital cameras, *Ten* (2002) was his masterpiece in terms of innovation with digital cameras. He wanted to make something different that he had always dreamed about. Kiarostami used a special kind of directing and removed himself as a professional director in favour of having a closer approach to the real world. His method was appreciated by innovative film-makers in Iran and abroad, although some conservatives did not accept it as real cinema (Kiarostami, 2012).

We will investigate Kiarostami's direction in *Ten* in detail as it has played a considerable role in Iranian digital cinema. But I now want to discuss the trend of digital cinema directing in Iran after *Ten*. Kiarostami worked on this method by making short films and documentaries such as *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (2003), and in 2004 he described his notion of digital film-making in a documentary film called *10 On Ten*. In fact, he experienced and invented a method of film-making with a small digital camera and opened a new window on the real world, offering this method to his followers. Then, Mania Akbari, the actress in *Ten*, made several movies by this method such as *20 Fingers* (2004) and *10 + 4* (2007), and Niki Karimi, an Iranian superstar who worked with Kiarostami as his assistant, made her first film by adopting this method in *One Night* (2005). *20 Fingers* won the prize for best digital film at the Venice Film Festival, which was the first time that this old festival had had a section for digital film.

The Kiarostami method of reducing the role of the director and equipment and asking actors to act and react freely in front of the camera based on the main plot was only possible with the use of small digital cameras. Sometimes, aesthetics were overlooked in favour of reality, but Kiarostami and his followers were not concerned about this. This method sometimes looked like Dogma95, but the main concern was to be truthful to reality rather than using fiction and dramatic plots. Thus, directors can use anything that does not distract non-professional actors from acting and real events from occurring. Therefore, theoretically there are no restrictions or limitations imposed by the equipment and crew insofar as they do not disturb the real world. This is based on what Kiarostami (2004) claims about the importance of truth. However, he also

claims that small digital cameras can free the cinema from the domination of capital and equipment; hence, in practice, in order to have more freedom, the loss of some aesthetics seems inevitable. Therefore, some shots have problems of lighting in the films made by this method. I am trying to prove that, although the films made with Kiarostami's method look like Dogma95 films, the theory behind them is different. In other words, the development of digital devices enabled this kind of film to be more artistic. As for the quality of this kind of film, we can clearly tell the difference between the quality and colour of films made by mini DV camera, such as *Ten*, and those with a Mini HD camera, such as *10+4* by Mania Akbari. Technically in DV format (*Ten*) we have standard definition (720 by 480 pixels) and thus we can recognise fewer colours while in HD format (*10+4*) we have high definition (1920 by 1080 pixels) and we can recognise a broader tonality of colours. Kiarostami, in his interview with me in 2012, claimed that he was overlooking aesthetics in early digital film and claims that his attitude to this has changed over time. Thus, we can see this new approach to digital cameras in *Shirin* (2008). Kiarostami did not follow this method (overlooking aesthetics) after *Shirin*, and his films have reverted to his previous method since 2010. Of course, he still takes advantage of digital cameras to enjoy more freedom in filming, particularly in terms of lighting and working with actors, but these films employ a group of professionals and the camera is not small, as we see in *Certified Copy* (2010) and its backstage documentary (*Let's See "Copia Conforme"*). Furthermore, *Like Someone in Love* (2012) is based on the aesthetics followed by Kiarostami in his pre-digital films. We can see a trend in Kiarostami's work from 2001 to the present, from documentaries such as *ABC Africa* to dramas such as *Ten* (2002), finally returning to dramas such as *Certified Copy* (2010). However, his followers such as Mania Akbari still partly take advantage of this method.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf is another master and international Iranian director who recognised digital film-making as new kind of film-making and started making digital films and theorising about them. Makhmalbaf is an innovative film-maker and claims to be a theorist and politician as well. Makhmalbaf (2012) claims that he made *Testing Democracy* to show that digital film-making can remove the domination of capital and consequently reduce censorship. He also claims that he reduced the crew to a minimum and chose a non-professional as co-director

to show that digital film-making can reduce the domination of technicians in cinema as well. In fact, Makhmalbaf wanted to deliver many messages in his film directly and rapidly. Thus, the work seems superficial and at the same time hard to achieve for followers who do not have the authority of a famous director like him. The other reason for the reduced influence of his film in comparison to *Ten* was the character of Makhmalbaf himself as an innovative director who liked to be involved in everything and then move on to another new subject and method. He also has spent most of his efforts on his family and supports them in following him. After *Testing Democracy*, Makhmalbaf made a documentary called *Afghan Alphabet* (2002) with a digital camera and then helped his daughter to make digital films in Afghanistan and Iran (Makhmalbaf, 2012). Then Hana Makhmalbaf made some short films and feature films with the support of her father. Her feature film about the conflict in the Iranian presidential election in 2009 called *Green Days* (2009) was shown at some international festivals. Makhmalbaf also used a small digital camera in his latest film *Gardener* (2012), which has a documentary structure like *Testing Democracy*. It seems that aesthetics are very important for Makhmalbaf and he believes in 35 mm in this regard. However, he explains that he believes in the digital camera aesthetic. He claims: "if someone knows what he wants to make, he can do artistic work with it" (Makhmalbaf, 2012). Makhmalbaf's family, Samira, Hana, Meysam and Marzie (his wife), followed his ideas in the short films and documentaries they made abroad but they used 35mm cameras in most of their drama features.

The direction of *Offside* may have been a turning point in the trend of digital film-making in Iran and the work of Jafar Panahi because of its different aspects. Firstly, *Offside* was made by a famous director who had never made film with video and was loyal to 35mm films before 2006. Secondly, he made this film in the context of a documentary about an event that happened at a certain time. Thirdly, the film was against government policy and rules and was made without its permission. Here, I should mention some of the effects of this film on the discourse of Iranian cinema and digitalisation and also on the next works of Jafar Panahi. In fact, Jafar Panahi was pushed towards digital cinema rather than choosing it freely. Iran's political circumstances formed an obstacle to Panahi's film-making, as he was always criticising the government through his

films. Therefore, he was looking for a method of making films without obtaining permission from the government (Firoozan, 2008). However, making *Offside* with a small HDV camera was a wise and justified decision that was approved by master cinematographers such as Mahmood Kalari (Rajabiforotan, 2008). Freedom from censorship was his motivation for adopting digital film-making. In fact, when Panahi had to work with a small camera, he chose a script and method that were suitable for this kind of film-making and showed the ability of the digital camera to make films. *Offside* influenced the discourse of Iranian cinema for several reasons. First, the script concerned a subject that was very popular (a football match) and Panahi forecast that it would have great box office appeal should it reach the screen. Second, it was made by an internationally recognised Iranian film-maker. Third, it won the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, and last, but not least, it explained the emotions and demands of a part of society in a realistic and believable way. Apparently, in 2006 many directors felt they could make serious and professional films in Iran or abroad using HDV cameras, and from that point onward the development of digital cameras and the importing of equipment to Iran accelerated. Therefore, we can say that a lot of digital work made after *Offside* was a consequence of his film.

However, Jafar Panahi's recent work, *This Not a Film* (2012), was a return to the early work of digital cinema and it was also successful internationally. However, the political aspect of this film was more important than any other aspect. Although this work may be very important in the history of world cinema (because it portrays someone making a film while under house arrest), it was not an important turning point in Panahi's work. In fact, Mohammad Noorizad, another Iranian film-maker in the same situation, attempted to make a film about himself with a small digital camera at the same time; however, he was arrested by the government and lost his footage. I think these films have value only when they are made by particular people, and they will not influence a trend of film-making.

Rakhshan Bani-Etemad is another Iranian director who recognised digital cameras as a new type of equipment for use in different kinds of film-making. She had experience of making a documentary by video and printed it on 35mm film in *Our Time* (2002). This was one of the independent political

documentaries in Iran at that time and it shows she recognised the advantage of using video for a better approach to reality. However, for drama she preferred to use 35 mm film. *Mainline* (2006) was her first drama to use digital cameras for filming. The main reasons for using a small portable digital camera were the locations of film and the special colour tonality required for that film. Of course, a small hand-held digital camera gives the film more of a documentary look, which is what the director was looking for (Rajabifrootan, 2008). However, this approach to digital film-making did not seem innovative in terms of directing because the director followed the method of her analogue films. Thus some critics condemned directors for using digital cameras for financial purposes. Kalari, the cinematographer of *Mainline*, denies this, claiming that a film like *Mainline* could not have been made on 35 mm film with special devices and studios that Iran does not have (Rajabifrootan, 2008). In other words, Bani-Etemad used a small digital camera for aesthetic reasons, which is not easy to achieve with low budgets in Iran. Although the production was a low-budget film, the post-production to achieve the desired results in terms of colour and quality consumed a lot of effort (Saharkhiz, 2012). Therefore, this approach to digital cameras cannot be considered a turning point in the history of digital film-making in Iran although, in terms of techniques, it was a successful experience for Iranian cinema. On the other hand, *Mainline* did not introduce a new method of directing among Iranian neorealist film-makers, who made documentaries and dramas about the social problems of Iranian women. Of course, *Mainline* was not a unique film that used digital footage to use a monochrome technique.

*Sarboland* by Saied Tehrani used the same technique in 2006; however, this film belonged to mainstream cinema in terms of cinematography and script. We may consider *Night Bus* (2007) by Kiumars Poorahmad among governmental cinema made with digital cameras because it was made in IRIB. However, to some extent we can consider his work to be a successful piece of digital film-making as the director not only takes advantage of the digital camera's light sensitivity and monochrome but also appreciates the light and small digital camera's advantages, as shown by his *decoupage*.

The resistance of Bahman Ghobadi and directors like him (who used to make poetic films) to working with small digital cameras was finally broken with the introduction of a new generation of digital cameras in Iran that used cinematic



lenses and had 2K quality. Ghobadi, as a director, tried to combine his poetic sensibility with a real story of a musician in Tehran and made an attractive digital film in the realm of independent cinema in Iran. The film's attraction is partly due to the music videos inserted in the film. In fact, *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009) represents the new generation of Iranian independent and underground cinema, which has an aesthetic advantage as well as freedom from censorship.

In fact, Ghobadi returned the visual aesthetic to independent Iranian films that celebrated our release from the shadow of the primary generation of digital cameras. His film is not only of good quality, but also has the advantage of using a superstar and a musical story. It would surely enjoy box office success were it to have any chance of being screened in Iran. With the introduction of professional 2K and full HD cameras to Iran, independent directors have the opportunity of choosing such devices without much compromising over the aesthetics of their work. Although Ghobadi took up digital film-making later than his masters, Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf, he has more courage in using digital film for his poetic work. Although *Rhino Season* (2012) by Bahman Ghobadi was filmed in Turkey with some non-Iranian actors, the story is about Iran. It has had a significant influence on digital film-making in Iran, especially in terms of using DSLR Canon Photography camera to make films (Salami, 2012). However, this was not a low-budget film, and it was the desire of the director and the cinematographer to use this kind of camera to create a record in digital film-making, as this film is the first feature movie to be filmed completely with a photography camera. He finally believes that, "nowadays, we can use digital as well as negative just if we know the spirit of cinema and look at the digital like negative, take it seriously and work with it accurately" (Ghobadi, 2014).

Generally, there has been a strong flow of independent film-making since 2000 and it has grown in quantity to the present day; however, only sections of these films can be recognised as considerable works of art, as most of the masters such as Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf believe. I assume that most of these films are the work of film-makers with cinematic backgrounds in 35 mm film or who have had good supervision by a master such as Kiarostami. Mohammad Rasoulof, director of *The White Meadow* (2009), *Goodbye* (2011) and *Manuscripts Don't Burn* (2013), is among the first group, having made two

35mm films before his digital work. We can also add Saman Salur, director of *Lonely Tune of Tehran* (2008) to this group. Mani Haghighi, who made *Abadan* (2004) and *Men at Work* (2006), belongs to the second group who received the support of professional artists of Iranian cinema in their work. I can name Mohamad Shirvani, who made *Navel* (2004) and *Fat Shaker* (2013), and Shahram Mokri, who made *Ashkan, The Charmed Ring and Other Stories* (2009) and *Fish and Cat* (2013) in the new generation of film-makers who have made all their feature films with digital cameras and received international recognition for them. Shirvani has experience with celluloid in his short films and documentaries, and Mokri has a lot of experience in the realm of short films, as we mentioned in a previous section. Logically, it seems that, after 2008 and the introduction of SI2K to Iran, most alternative and art film-making moved to digital because of the freedom and budget. However, sometimes they do not provide any information about their method of film-making for various reasons, such as gaining admission to festivals as 35 mm films or making loan applications.

To sum up, two kinds of directors have become increasingly prevalent since 2000 thanks to the introduction of digital cameras to Iran: directors who follow the mainstream cinema and the rules of producers or the TV industry; and the independent innovative directors. This growing trend is logical and based on the ever-increasing quality of digital devices and the diminishing costs. As Heydarian (2012) claims, after recognising this kind of film-making, the government has tried to control it through festivals and TV offers.

The independents, who are attempting to make alternative cinema, are also growing in the shadow of masters such as Makhmalbaf and Kiarostami, but these film-makers have not been controlled and supervised and, as Ghasemkhan claims, without supervision and management they make a lot of “rubbish” works. In fact, the word ‘rubbish’ was used by several of my interviewees to describe this kind of work. Makhmalbaf (2012) called them ‘a noise’ in Iranian cinema discourse. They cause chaos in independent film-making and make it very difficult for festivals to select the good artistic work (Makhmalbaf, 2012). However, Kiarostami (2012) and even Makhmalbaf (2012) believe that, despite the preponderance of incompetent work, there are artistic independent directors who have grown up in the digital cinema context, a fact

that surprises them. They are surprised because they have encountered films, by young film-makers from distant areas of Iran, that are very artistic and innovative (Kiarostami, 2012).

### *Digital Distribution*

I categorize the digital distribution of digital films and videos in Iran in two ways. The first is based on media and devices of distribution (Internet, discs), while the second is based on rights and laws (black market, law-abiding distributors). In fact, the cultural contents of films and videos have an important role in terms of distribution in all categories, whether it is against the dominant ideology or not. In addition, the interaction between different categories, especially between the Internet and distribution by discs, should be considered in this regard. Concerning the cultural content, we can refer to Manovich, who believes that there is change in terms of marketing in this new media and the new media has a special strategy for each individual based on his/her interest. (Manovich, 2001).

Since 2000, the sporadic progress of the Internet in Iran has had many ups and downs. Due to the cost of high-speed internet, which has been too expensive for the Iranian middle class, and the additional filters and government threats against users of many sites, the efficiency of the Internet has decreased in terms of distribution of films (Sarabpoor, 2013). However, it has worked as a very cheap source of films for distributors in the black market. They download films from the Internet and then distribute them by CD or DVD and even by Bluetooth. In this case, three different media help one another (a sort of criminal contribution). Due to a lack of strong copyright law for digital media coupled with the poor quality of internet services in Iran, official distributors do not trust the Internet for distribution.

I should briefly mention Bluetooth as a medium that has not been recognised by official sources for the distribution of anything; in fact, it is one of the most effective media in terms of culture and politics. The role of Bluetooth in the distribution of news, events and criminal acts for ordinary people who have no access to the Internet is very impressive. In fact, the distribution of digital images by Bluetooth regardless of the source of these images (mobile camera, internet) creates a hidden culture inside the main culture of society and against

the dominant ideology. Although Bluetooth can be recognised as a visual subculture that facilitates some forms of oral behaviour such as gossip, the significant effect of Bluetooth in certain political events such as the 'green movement' is undeniable. However, it should not be mentioned as an important distributing medium for the artistic work and cinema with which we are concerned in this research. Thus, I ignore this form of distribution because there is no record of distribution of any cinematic material in Iran by this method.

The Iranian government took a long time to accept the right of distribution and exhibition of home videos and CDs, and it only did so when the Iranian market was taken over by the black market. We can mention some famous films such as *Leily Ba man Ast* (1996) by Kamal Tabrizi or *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2008) by Bahman Ghobadi, which describe the situation regarding the distribution of visual material in Iran. The first official distributor of CDs was the Visual Media Institute, which is part of the government. The development of this Institute's activities caused significant changes in film-making by video in Iran, but it did not succeed as a distributor until private rival companies began their activities in 2005. In other words, Visual Media Institute contributed to the making of several documentaries and drama films with digital videos (such as *Born with Aids* directed by Alireza Razazifar and supported by UNICEF) but the Institute could not support these products in terms of distribution until private distributors helped in the process. The activities of official (governmental and private) distributors of digital materials should be categorised in two parts: Distribution of Iranian productions and distribution of foreign productions.

The introduction of DVDs affected distribution in two ways. On the one hand, the emergence of a new generation of DVDs reduced the cost of distribution for the distributor and the cost of discs for law-abiding consumers. On the other hand, it increased the likelihood of illegal copies being made by ordinary people and small illegal companies because the cost of DVDs and DVD writers decreased in Iran with no loss of quality.

### *The Black Market*

The most important effect of digital cinema in terms of distribution should be investigated in the so-called black market. We deliberately use the expression 'so-called' because it sometimes does not act like a market (selling or buying

things.) It acts like a subculture that does not recognise the right of the author in anyway.

Technically, the black market for visual media began with the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. The strict rules about music and film in Islamic society could not satisfy all people in every walk of life. Thus, the black market gradually emerged to copy and distribute 16mm films and then video tapes as well. After the introduction of compact discs and DVDs to Iran, the black market developed and became safer and more profitable for the people who engaged in this traffic thanks to the lack of strong copyright for visual work in Iranian law and the reduced amount of time and money required for copying and distributing discs. Since 2000, a new complicated black market with 20 years' experience in distributing analogue visual media has taken over the whole country. In fact, the black market for videos was born with the Islamic revolution in 1979 when there was demand to watch uncensored movies and the new government banned their distribution and exhibition. The picture of the black market represented in Ghobadi's film *No One Knows about Persian Cats* seems more realistic than what is officially said about the black market in Iran. Indeed, most distributors in the black market are lower-class people with low incomes, like the main character in Ghobadi's film.

In fact, the black market has a harmful effect on the economy of the Iranian cinema as well. The famous Iranian producer, Morteza Shayeste, claims that the Iranian cinema has lost one hundred milliard Toomans (equivalent to 100 million Dollars by that time) because of the black market. Sometimes, Iranian films are distributed on the black market before they have a chance to be exhibited in cinemas (Habibinia, 2007). Film-makers and government have frequently condemned each other for distributing digital copies since 2005 when conservatives took over the country. For example, the same thing happened in the case of *Offside*, and Jafar Panahi rejected accusations that he himself had distributed the film on the black market (Firoozan, 2008).

Surprisingly, some film-makers use the opportunity to distribute on the black market to boost their reputations or for other political or cultural purposes. The most recent example of this occurred when *Nobody Knows about Persian Cats* was banned in Iran, and Ghobadi decided to distribute it via the subculture

method of distributing digital film. At the start of the Iranian copy of the film, he asks people to copy the film and give it to their friends. Hence, this film became more popular than his other films. However, Naficy (2012) explains this event differently. He believes that the digital distribution of this film on the black market with the director's permission can be considered an evolution in underground cinema in Iran. Moreover, the Iranian scholar Montazerghaem concluded in his research that independent cinema in Iran like *No One Knows About Persian Cats* is growing through distribution and production facilities provided by digital film-making and by-passing the governmental regulations (Montazer Ghaem and Taghizade, 2011).

In fact, one of the most considerable and complicated potentials of the black market can be found in the case of *Poverty and Prostitution* (2005), a documentary made by Masoud Dehnamaki, a conservative who played an important role for the dominant ideology in terms of the media. He was a journalist and one of the leaders of a pressure group opposed to the reformist government in Iran since the 1990s (Ahangarani, 2008). The distribution of *Poverty and Prostitution* via the black market brought many cultural benefits for conservatives, and it was the best-selling documentary in the middle of the first decade of the new century in Iran. *Poverty and Prostitution* examines the trafficking of an Iranian girl to Arabian countries for prostitution purposes, and it criticises the policy of the reformist government in regard to poor people. The content of the film was against one of two rival ideologies in the reform discourse and it worked in spite of the bad reputation of its author as a conservative. Sometimes, official media boost the distribution of a film via the black market by criticising it on TV or in governmental newspapers. In fact, legal media act as advertisers for illegal media. Astonishingly, the most powerful distributions in terms of digital cinema in Iran have been carried out by this method. *Poverty and Prostitution* was one of these films.

### *Digital Exhibition*

In terms of exhibition, we cannot find any complete project in Iran by 2012. Since 2007, Cinema City, a governmental company, has taken responsibility for supporting and helping movie theatres in terms of improvements and reconstructions. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance considered a

budget for constructing new cinemas and improving projectors and digital sound in cinemas. However, its main focus was on importing film printers from abroad and converting digital copy to film instead of using digital projectors. During the phase of reconstruction of the old movie theatres by the government, the changing of the screening system to digital was proposed but did not take place (Rezadad, 2012).

In fact, digital exhibition in Iran was limited to home video until 2011 because, on the one hand, the poor quality of internet speed is insufficient to exhibit films and, on the other hand, most mobile phones used in Iran are inadequate too. As for home screening, it is predicted that the digital exhibition of film with digital surround sound and HD wide screen 32 inch LDD will eliminate official cinemas and establish a new type of cinema in private parties and homes in the near future, as Razavian (2012) believes. However, the government began to move towards digital cinema in the final months of 2011. They staged the International Children's Film Festival, which is the second most important Iranian film festival for digital films. They repeated the experience in 2012. Finally, the International Fajr International Film Festival, which is the most important film festival in Iran, exhibited films in digital only and did not accept 35 mm copies. At the same time, some cinemas have gradually been equipping themselves with digital servers and projectors provided by 'Cinema Shahr', a governmental organisation for developing cinemas, although they also use 35 mm copies (Meschi, 2014).

Finally, "since the summer of 2013, making 35 mm copies was not economical for producers and distribution companies" Meschi, the head of Cinema Shahr, claims. He mentions two reasons for this rapid change toward digitalisation: first, most of the production process (filming and editing) became digital, and digital copies neither required a scanning process nor incurred expenses; second, the number of cinema theatres that support digital exhibition increased, resulting in greater opportunity to screen films in different cinemas. He explains that, although the digitalisation of cinema theatres' exhibition facilities started in 2012, progress was very slow until autumn 2013. Then, in a very speedy campaign, the majority of cinema theatres were equipped with digital projectors and servers in a six-month period. He claims in his last interview in spring 2014 that "we have 320 active cinemas, 210 of which are digitalised in terms of

exhibition”, and he believes that by the end of 2014 all Iranian active cinema theatres will be equipped with digital exhibition systems (Meschi, 2014). However, the process of digitalising cinema theatres in Iran follows a special logic which is based on the specifications of Iranian cinema and Iranian audiences, as Meschi claims, and of course the logic of new media based on Manovich’s (2002) notion. Manovich (2002) believes that new media technology brings a new logic in terms of marketing. In the case of Iran, the government has focused on E-Cinema rather than D-Cinema (using Digital Cinema Package) and has been following India in its method of equipping cinema theatres. As Meschi describes, the E-Cinema technique, which supports files with MPEG compression, uses SD projectors for small screens and HD projectors for big ones. As the Iranian cinema has many differences in terms of film production, audience and marketing compared to Western countries, digital cinema provides Iranian cinema with a different form of exhibition. This kind of exhibition model is financially cheaper, addresses the standard of Iranian film production and satisfies the majority of the Iranian audience, according to studies conducted by Cinema Shahr (Meschi, 2014). Of course, the government has equipped some cinemas in big cities with D-Cinema servers for special films and occasions (Meschi, 2014). Thus, we see the logic of digital cinema and new media for audiences and marketing. In fact, the nature of digital cinema, which is “composed of digital code” (Manovich, 2001, p.49), provides films in different versions according to audiences and films.

At this point I should also mention digital surround sound exhibition, although some managers such as Meschi believe that, because of the themes and style of Iranian films, the quality of sound recording it is not an important issue for Iranian cinema. Digital sound has a different history in Iran; the government started equipping cinema theatres that they had helped to refurbish or build with digital surround sound in 2004. This process has continued gradually for new and refurbished cinemas since then. Hence, 120 Iranian cinemas were using digital surround sound by 2014 but there are no future plans for other old cinemas. Meschi (2014) believes that, for cinemas that suffer from poor basic standards, such as insufficient seats and inadequate lighting and air conditioning, the notion of modern digital speakers and surround sound systems



is absurd. On the other hand, sound recording in Iranian cinema does not require this kind of exhibition in the case of many mainstream movies.

I should point out the effect of digital home cinema materials such as DVDs on cinema exhibition. Meschi believes that although digital technology helps Iranian cinema in terms, of exhibition, at the same time the DVD and CD, which are other aspects of digitalisation, act against it in Iran. He claims that the cost of a DVD is one third of a cinema ticket and DVDs are released just three months after the exhibition of films in cinemas. Therefore, audiences prefer to wait for the DVDs in order to watch them with their families. This seems to be the case even if we ignore the role of the black market in trading newly released Iranian films.

To sum up, in this chapter, I have tried to describe digital cinema in Iran from several different viewpoints. Through this description I show the importance of the work of masters of Iranian neorealist cinema, especially Kiarostami and his disciples, in shaping the new approach and content in Iranian cinema, on which we will focus in the next chapter. They are the pioneers of digital cinema in Iran and also introduced it to world cinema.

I also show the influence of this new technology on the main body of Iranian cinema as it influences the hierarchy of cinematic guilds in some cases. Although these changes were sometimes very complex due to several factors that affect certain aspects such as documentary film-making, I have tried to examine some changes based on Manovich's (2002) notion of 'computer culture' and the influence of the computer layer on the cultural layer of new media generally. Therefore, in the cases of editing, sound designing and cinematography, where the technicians deal with the interface of this new technology, we discussed the resistance to and overall ups and downs of the digitalization of Iranian cinema. But in the case of certain new guilds such as visual effects, we can consider the user-friendly interface of digital cinema as an advantage for the emergence of this important technology in Iran. On the other hand, I tried to show some of the changes that have occurred in Iranian cinema in the "Use of computer techniques in traditional filmmaking[...]Filmmakers' reaction to increasing reliance on computer techniques in postproduction

[...]Filmmakers' reaction to the convention of new media" (Manovich, 2001, pp.287-288).

Although we mainly focus on dramatic cinema in this research, the investigation of short films and documentaries demonstrates two points about digital cinema in Iran. First, certain characteristics which we recognise as digital cinema, such as freedom from capital and the limitations of raw material resources, can be traced back to some documentaries in pre-digital cinema. Second, the new generation of digital film-makers in Iran trained with video in some Iranian governmental organisations making short films before the digital era. Thus, digital was not an unexpected revolution for Iranian cinema, and Iranian cinema had planned for this freedom and was waiting for the changes.

Digital exhibition and distribution and the digital black market created various opportunities for and threats to Iranian cinema, as we discussed. In fact the social and political situation of Iran caused particular reactions in this regard. Iranian cinema, which suffered from financial problems, benefited from digital exhibition and saved considerable resources that had been consumed on negatives and other material; on the other hand, the quality of exhibition was improved by the introduction of new digital projectors and servers. However, cinema faces a real threat from the black market and the government's poor policy on home videos. I would also point to Manovich's (2002) notion about the distribution of digital material and the different logic for distribution and exhibition. He believes that "The logic of new media technology reflects this new social logic" (Manovich, 2001, p.60). We then discussed the role of the black market in the freedom of and access to digital cinema and examined the different kinds of exhibition of Iranian films in cinema theatres according to audiences and films.

## **Chapter 3: Representations of Reality in Iranian Digital Cinema**

## *Introduction*

In this chapter, I plan to investigate the changes that have occurred in the works of some 'masters' of Iranian cinema after the introduction of digital devices in Iran. I want to compare the works of these film-makers before and after the arrival of digital technology and to discover the influence of digital film-making on their work. In so doing, I will try to discern some key characteristics of Iranian digital cinema.

Based on what we have explained in previous chapters, the artistic independent part of contemporary Iranian cinema is known as *Iranian Neorealism* due to its specific approach to realism. I traced the usage of this term for Iranian cinema by scholars in the literature review since the early 2000s although some journalists had previously used this term to refer to Iranian films entered in international festivals. Nevertheless, Hamid Dabashi (2001), in his book *Close up, Past, Present and Future of Iranian Cinema*, was among the first scholars to use this term very briefly. Then Tapper (2002) and the scholars who contributed to his book *New Iranian Cinema* used this term, including Laura Mulvey (2002) who also used the term 'Second New Wave' for neorealism after the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

Dabashi, in his later work *Master and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (2007), tries to generate another term for Iranian cinema. As Dabashi puts it, "something of a major epistemic and aesthetic break is globally evident in this cinema, similar to the way that Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, or German New Cinema had broken new ground" (Dabashi, 2007, p.17). He believes that, although Iranian cinema may have been influenced by Italian Neorealism, we should not describe this entire phenomenon as neorealism. In fact, he has called it *Iranian Para-realism* and describes this kind of realism as "a take on realism that gives above, beyond, beside, and around reality, there and then, by and by, to frame and force it to yield its hidden alternatives, its undelivered promises" (Dabashi, 2007, p.17). Regardless of what we call the Iranian cinema (para-realism or neo-realism), 'reality' is an important factor to be considered in this cinema. However, based on the case-studies we have chosen in this context, which are more similar to the concept of neorealism, I prefer to regard these films as part of Iranian neorealism. I adopt Hamid

Naficy's notions about Iranian Neorealism, as explained in his article *Neorealism, Iranian Style* and in his four-volume book *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* (2010-2012), for this research.

Naficy (2011b) divides Iranian neorealism into two parts – before and after the Islamic revolution - and he calls the latter 'Iranian Art House Cinema'. He believes that "Neorealism has had a long and distinctive history in Iranian cinema. Some of the best filmmakers were influenced by its philosophical tenets and stylistic features, and domestic and foreign critics made much of the impact of Italian neorealism on Iranian authorial cinemas both before (New Wave) and after the revolution (art house cinema)" (Naficy, 2011b, p.226). Naficy (2011b) mentions *Cow* (1969) directed by Dariush Mehrjui as the first neorealist New Wave Iranian film although we can consider *Khest va Ayeneh* (1965) directed by Ebrahim Golestan among neorealist works. Naficy also names *Tall Shadow of Wind* (1978) directed by Bahman Farmanara and *O.K. Mister* (1978) directed by Masoud Kimiavi as the last ones before the Islamic revolution. He mentions Bahram Beyzaei, Abbas Kiarostami, Ebrahim Golestan, Sohrab Shahid Sales and others as Iranian New Wave film-makers. However, in Iranian neorealist cinema after the revolution (Art House Cinema), Kiarostami and his disciples such as Jafar Panahi and Bahman Ghobadi have played the main roles. Thus, we can count his film *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987) as a turning point and a new beginning for Iranian neorealism. Mohsen Makhmalbaf has also joined neorealist film-makers from governmental and mainstream cinema since the 1980s. Naficy (2011b) mentioned certain rules that we can trace in Iranian neorealism such as "location shooting, long takes, invisible style of filming and editing, predominance of medium and long shots, use of contemporary true-to-life subjects, open-ended plots, working-class protagonists, nonprofessional cast, vernacular dialogue, implied social criticism" (Naficy, 2011b, p.226).

As we are investigating reality and our case-study focuses on realist films, I should explain these concepts again based on what we have mentioned in previous chapters. Although film-makers would like to show reality in their films, this desire and claim "is no more than a moral precept. In cinema, there can only be representation of reality. The aesthetic problem begins with the means of this representation" (Williams, 1980, p.41). Bazin believes we should not consider reality as a quality. "The same event, the same object is capable of

several different representations” (Williams, 1980, p.53). However, at the same time he believes this aesthetic representation of reality should not put down the truth of the reality. If we believe in cinematic language as a way of delivering meanings, “Representation is the production of meaning through language” (Hall, 1997, p.16). This language is the use of raw cinematic material, techniques and forms to convey its meaning. When we work with cinematic language, we show another kind of reality, which is cinematic reality. Thus, representation of reality merges with another kind of reality and, as Kiarostami believes, it should be close to the truth (Kiarostami, 2004). Other neorealists, such as Rossellini, believe that “realism is simply the artistic form of truth” (Williams, 1980, p.53). Thus, the realist tries to show the true value of the real world as it is. We can consider a simple idea of realism proposed by Bazin, who describes the objective of the film image as rescuing “moments of the real world as they are, preserving them from the corruption of time” (Williams, 1980, p.54). To some extent, realist film represents life “lived and observed” (Nichols, 1991, p.166), and the task of the film-maker is to truthfully produce it as it appears to the eye and the ear in everyday life. However, we can find more complex ideas about realism, such as psychological realism, which means conveying “the sense of a plausible, believable, and accurate representation of human perception and emotion” (Nichols, 1991, p.171). In fact, with reference to different descriptions of realism over time, we can find a point of agreement about realism in that “film should in some sense be truthful or tell the truth” (Williams, 1980, p.79).

The definition of truth in art was debated by ancient Greek philosophers and the debate continues to this day. “The notion of truth in art, and indeed the very definition of art, has been time and again related to the notion of mimesis, which is understood primarily as a truth-bearing relation between a work of art and reality” (Guter, 2010, pp. 205-6). Barthes (1977) considers truth versus appearance and partially bonds it to the quest of the artist which can be read like a message in his/her work. Some film theorists consider truth in terms of film versus “what is make-believe or illusion”. (Rushton, 2011, p.3); thus, it means “true to reality” as they explain. “Such ‘truths’ about cinematic experiences in the final instance must be made on account of any particular film’s strategies of representation and can ultimately only be guided by the

question of whether such and such a film is representing the 'real world' truthfully or adequately" (Rushton, 2011, p.3). This will become clearer when cinematic reality is explained later.

Film-makers have used raw materials and different techniques, forming them to represent reality in their films, and the development of equipment has influenced their methods. For instance, Wyler, with the help of deep focus, wide lenses and the avoidance of cuts, was able to "make the shot more alive" and give the spectator the opportunity to "study character as he pleases" (Williams, 1980, p.43). Bazin also believed in "deep focus cinematography" as a factor in the construction of his realistic aesthetic (Williams, 1980, p.197). I should point out the depth of field as one of the advantages of first-generation digital cameras, by Kiarostami in his digital films and discussed by Figgis (2007). Avoiding cuts and using sequence-shots is another technique used by realist filmmakers such as Wyler to promote more realism in films. However, some realist film-makers such as Errol Morris believe that "style does not guarantee truth. The use of available light and a hand-held camera does not mean that what you are doing is any more truthful than anything else. Truth is pursuit, it's a quest" (Cunningham, 2005, p57).

Bazin believes that reality looks like geometric objects in space; therefore, "film is the asymptote to reality" (Monaco, 1997, p.457). Thus, it never touches reality; however, we can remain close to it. Realist filmmakers make films appear close to the real world by using cinematic language. In other words, realists adopt textures and rhythms of the real world and use camera movement, lighting, sound and editing "that seem at first natural, inevitable, or simply at the service of the story" (Nichols, 1991, p.165). Kiarostami believes that cinema should be about reality rather than just storytelling but "the first step to a new aesthetic of cinema is to break this reality" (Kiarostami, 2004). He believes that, by separating and reassembling the details of reality, we make something artistic and different from reality but close to the 'truth' and we can call it *cinematic reality*. The term 'cinematic reality' used by Bazin (1967) seems closer to Kiarostami's idea. He states the role of the real world (like a documentary) in what the film-maker makes in a fiction film, although the film theorist Rushton believes that, "for Bazin, cinema does not represent reality, but cinema is, in one way or another, reality itself" (2010, p.44). Here Deleuze's

idea about reality in cinema is also important. Deleuze believes that a film shot “acts like a consciousness. But the sole cinematographic consciousness is not us, the spectator, not the hero; it is the camera” (Deleuze, 1986, p.20).

Ruston (2010) explains the defence of Deleuze’s notion of cinematic reality and what is considered the representation of reality in film. He states: “in the cinema we do not perceive reality, we perceive representations, constructions, fabrications. Deleuze utterly dismisses such conceptions. For him, natural perception constructs reality in much the same way as cinematographic perception does, so why would cinematic reality be any less real than reality itself” (Rushton, 2010, p.129)? Thus, with this attitude, the emphasis on ‘Truth’ for realist film-makers seems vital. Based on Deleuze’s idea, “The reality of films does not lie behind or beyond them. Rather, the reality of film is what films themselves are” (Rushton, 2010, p.129).

For a film-maker such as Kiarostami, judging by the content of his films and statements, the idea of cinematic reality is simpler and more tangible, as he mentioned previously. Meanwhile he seems aware of the role of reality in what he creates as art and in the real world and what he has to do to represent reality in it or show it truthfully.

In this chapter, we adopt Kiarostami’s idea about the representation of reality and cinematic reality. Thus, our main effort is to investigate and find the resemblance and relation of real-world detail to what we see in film. This means that, when we investigate lighting, we are discussing the natural light that is adopted in a film and, of course, the influence of digital filmmaking on it. For instance, when we are talking about acting, my main concern is with the naturalistic and believable performances of actors. In other words, I try to investigate the extent to which this representation is close to the real world on the one hand and the extent to which digital filmmaking changes it on the other.

In this chapter, I have selected six films by three internationally recognised filmmakers. Abbas Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and Bahman Ghobadi could be considered as representatives of three generations of Iranian neorealist filmmakers. I chose these three as case-studies for particular reasons:



- In case of final comparison, they have specific methods and certain common points that make the comparison between them more logical. For example, they use non-professional actors but they direct them by different methods with and without digital camera. Thus, we can find the influence of digital cameras on acting with different methods and determine precisely what it is that the digital camera affects.
- They are seriously involved in digital filmmaking and their digital works are as internationally recognised as their previous works.
- They belong to different generations of Iranian film-makers, with different backgrounds; thus, their work exemplifies a wide spectrum of Iranian Neorealism.

I have chosen two films by Abbas Kiarostami, a 35mm film *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and a digital film *Ten* (2002). Then, in the next section, I compare two films by Jafar Panahi, a 35mm film *The Circle* (2000) and a digital film *Offside* (2006). My final comparison is between two films by Bahman Ghobadi, *Half Moon* (2006) made in 35mm format and *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009), a digital film.

There are some important points to discuss relating to these directors and their films. *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten* are both situated in a car. *The Circle* and *Offside* are both about restrictions in Iran and feature women as main characters. Both *Half Moon* and *No One Knows Persian Cats* are about music and feature non-actors and actors working alongside each other. Of course there are more common points which I explain later in each case. In the first level of comparison, these common points between each (analogue and digital) film facilitate the analysis and examination to some extent, as I discuss later in relevant sections. For example, in the case of Kiarostami's work I will be able to compare aesthetic points of lighting in digital and analogue more clearly because we have the same location and the same director but the director utilised different kinds of equipment (digital and analogue). Therefore we will see that these different lightings are not a result of the location specification and we can then examine the influence of digital filming on lighting more clearly.

In this chapter, I consider a few points that facilitate an analysis of these films based on what Kiarostami mentioned in his film *10 on Ten*, his interviews about *Certified Copy*, and his interviews in September 2012 and January 2014 with the author, and I will also be drawing on concepts from Mike Figgis's book *Digital Filmmaking*.

I chose these aspects based on ideas by both Kiarostami and Figgis. Kiarostami (2004) states that camera, subject, script, location, music, actors, accessories and director are factors that should be considered in a digital film such as *Ten*. Figgis divided the digital camera's attributes into camera movement and lighting. I omitted music from both lists because it was irrelevant to this chapter and our discussion about representing reality. In fact Kiarostami and Figgis both disregard music as a specification of their digital work. I try to analyse accessories when I discuss location and director. Therefore, I analyse the films based on these seven factors: subject, actor, location, script, lighting, camera (movement and angle) and director.

I did not include editing in these factors for various reasons: firstly, as we discussed in the second chapter Iranian film editors believe that digital editing simply facilitates their work and does not change it in terms of aesthetics and concept; secondly, Figgis and Kiarostami do not mention editing as a separate factor in their work; and, thirdly, the directors discussed in this chapter are authors and they edit their work as a part of their directorial job. For instance, when Kiarostami mentions omitting scenes after filming them to create cinematic reality, he considers this work as his directorial job. Thus, I mention this factor in my discussion of directing rather than in a separate section. Kiarostami, in his second interview with the author, claims that he deliberately did not mention editing in *10 on Ten*. He admitted that, in his digital cinema, editing has no significant role. He claims that "artistic and pure cinema is not made in an editing suite. It is made at the time of filming" (Kiarostami, 2014). He adds that, in his digital works, "editing is like darning the ruptured part of a rug"; thus, it cannot be an innovative part of this kind of film-making (Kiarostami, 2014). Of course, he admits this is slightly extreme idea and in industrial cinema editors can play more important roles, and sometimes a good editor can make a film from absurd rushes. He adds "I cannot deny creative editing but I personally look for a creative cinema that does not need editing" (Kiarostami 2014). We

should also note that this kind of cinema is different from certain aspects of formalist cinema such as the work of Eisenstein. "For Eisenstein, montage has as its aim the creation of ideas, of a new reality, rather than the support of narrative, the old reality of experience" (Monaco, 2009, P 452). In fact, in this chapter we discuss how, in Iranian neo-realism and Kiarostami's cinema, editing has a less significant role.

### *Subject*

When discussing films, subject is one of the key aspects considered by Kiarostami, Ghobadi and Panahi. Although there are several definitions of the subject of film, some of them broader than others, and these masters of Iranian cinema consider the most precise meaning when talking about the subjects of their own films. Their definitions are close to what Syd Field referred to as sentences that state the character and events of the film or, in other words, "who your movie is about or what happens to him or her" (Field, 2003, p.25). Considering this notion, when Panahi states that his film is about restriction or the restriction of women, he uses gender as character and summarises all actions against this gender as "restriction". We can identify the subject of *Ten* as people in "everyday life". Kiarostami himself believes it "is based on everyday life" (Kiarostami 2004) and he does not want to confine the subject to a gender or specific action.

We do not need to stick to a particular definition to discuss the subjects of these films but these three directors do clearly define the subjects of their films, and their methods of defining them are the same two or three words. Thus, it is useful to discuss the subjects of their films and compare them based on their definitions. In fact, they state the general subject of the film instead of going into the detail of the story and this general subject is more useful for our discussion when we want to discuss the role of the digital camera in choosing a subject. Of course, I do not restrict our discussion to general subjects and will go into more relevant detail in the case of each film. As an example, I explain what 'every day life' is, in Kiarostami's opinion, and why the focus keeps moving from one character to another in an 'ordinary' day.

## *Script*

One of the most important aspects of the works of the masters of Iranian cinema is the script. As these film-makers mainly work as author-directors, this aspect has a strong bond with the directing, sometimes mixing with it. However, as the writing and directing methods of these film-makers are different, we need to have a main structure or paradigm for comparing these different works with one another. This paradigm is used simply to facilitate comparisons between different methods of writing or generating the scripts of these film-makers. I use the word 'generate' because some of these scripts are not written down. They are created during the film-making process.

There are several forms of narrative available for making different kinds of films and different kinds of script but we can refer to the "dominant mode as Classical Hollywood Cinema" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.94). This follows cause-and-effect chains and begins from a desire of a character, who must overcome a certain obstacle to achieve their goal. I should add that these kinds of narrative are sometimes partially inspired by folkloric tale and stories of ancient myths. Vladimir Propp (1958) recognised a pattern and common sections in folkloric fairy tales, which contained thirty-one functions. Joseph Campbell (1949) describes a pattern for mythical stories based on his mythological studies. He recognises some main sections and several stages in most of the stories about heroes and their adventures, which influence some Hollywood movies such as the Star Wars series, as I explain in the fourth chapter. Thus, most of these narratives follow some main points in their patterns which we can recognise in mainstream narrative. They start with a quest and end with the achievement of a goal after overcoming difficulties and having adventures.

Syd Field defines a screenplay as a "linear arrangement of related incidents, episodes, and events leading to a dramatic resolution" (Field, 2005, p.199) and suggests a paradigm that covers the beginning, middle and end of a script. The beginning of such a script is called 'Act I' and contains scenes that open the film and set up the story before moving to a plot point. "The PLOT POINT is an incident, or event, that "hooks" into the action and spins it around into another direction" (Field, 2003, P.232). Then 'Act II' begins; this is called confrontation and it is the middle of the screenplay. At the end of this part comes another plot point that leads us into 'Act III', the resolution (Field 2005). Considering this

three-act paradigm helps us to compare different scripts, although we may not find any scripts that completely match this paradigm in this chapter. We are simply trying to find certain factors and similarities within the scripts to assess the extent to which the transition to digital film-making can affect the scripts. We also use other points in screenplays for this comparison, such as the climax and hooks that motivate the audience to follow the film. Field believes that characters are another foundation of the screenplay beside structure and plot, and that characters interact in several ways with one another, themselves or circumstances (Field, 2003). He also believes that the beginning and ending of the screenplay are very important. He states, “The ending comes out of the beginning. Someone, or something, initiates an action, and how that action is resolved becomes the story line of the film” (Field, 2005, P.127).

I should mention certain characteristics of Iranian film narrative that are adopted from Iranian culture and literature and then used in some kinds of Iranian films, from the commercial to the neorealist style. Hamid Naficy (2011a) believes that “Improvisation is one of the key features of the Iranian literary and performance art, particularly of classic poetry, comic theatrical performance (ruhozi and siahbazi), oral epic storytelling (naqqali), classical art music and now cinema” (Naficy, 2011a, p.213). ‘The improvisation’ is one of the elements of neorealist films that I analyse here. Naficy mentioned ‘repetition’ as another element of some films that is rooted in Iranian music and architecture. He explains repetition as follows: “not only the repetition of individual motifs, or absences thereof, but also the repetition of sets of motifs to create larger patterns and complexities” (Naficy, 2011a, p.214). Another element borrowed by Iranian film narrative from this tradition is self-reflexivity. Naficy (2012) believes that Iranian art house cinema borrows this from *taziye*, a kind of passion play rooted in religious beliefs of Iranians, rather than from other sources. “Self-reflexivity in Iranian cinema, and in Kiarostami’s films in particular, takes several forms, one is self-inscription, by which the filmmaker inserts himself into his film dietetically, sometimes as himself, as in *Taste of Cherry* and *A.B.C Africa*, and sometimes by proxy” (Naficy, 2012, p.192). This means that characters in the films represent the director. These kinds of self-reflexivity are used in Iranian art house cinema and I discuss them in pre- and post-digitalisation films, not only in terms of script but also in terms of actors and directors.

I use the three-act paradigm as a model for analysing the scripts and comparing them to one another. This means that, in the first step, I am looking for a three-act structure in the scripts, if one exists; I then mention some minor points such as climax and hooks, which are used throughout the film. However, this is the primary step of this comparison. As we are investigating reality in this chapter, the main point I emphasise during this comparison is the connection of these scripts to the real world; this is related to the method of writing these scripts and elements of the real world that are conducted in them. For example, Ghobadi uses real characters in his films and allows them to contribute to their interactions and dialogue, while Kiarostami uses real, natural locations and characters, and merely records their actions. These are two kinds of contribution to the real world in films. Therefore, we investigate the scripts of these films in two aspects. On the one hand, I assess their structure as pre-structured drama, and on the other hand I assess elements of the real world added to the script. We may find two opposite directions in the use of the real world. This means that scripts that are less structured have more elements of the real world, such as *Ten* by Abbas Kiarostami.

### *Location*

Location is one of the important components of film-making. "One of the difficulties in any film is how to externalize the inner thoughts of a character. This is especially true when there is no narrator to rely on for exposition. Location is especially important to learn how to exploit, as it's available in every shot." (Sijll, 2005, p.232) I used location as one factor with which to investigate digital films, following ideas expressed by Kiarostami in *10 on Ten* and Figgis in his book *Digital Film-Making*. Kiarostami may emphasise the role of location because he believes that we should ignore *mise-en-scene* in digital films such as *Ten*. Sometimes, he points to location as setting and he also believes in significant interaction between his favourite location (car) and setting and acting; occasionally, he reduces his role as director and those of the other crew members in favour of the location.

However, I will investigate location in various kinds of films in this chapter and show that the location can be an important factor that influences setting, acting, camera movement and so on. It is also characteristic of other kinds of digital works. I will point out several aspects of location based on the film we are

discussing. For example, one of the “important considerations for a location is size” (Crisp, 1998, p21), as is connection to natural environment. Figgis believes that when one chooses a part of a street in which to film without manipulating passers-by and controlling the traffic, one is approaching the real world in a better way. In other words, “you just observe the environment sufficiently to know where to put the camera, and then you let the environment continue.” (Figgis, 2007, P.54) In fact, by using this kind of location, “[you] infiltrate yourself into a natural environment, and [you do] not try to change it” (Figgis, 2007, P.54). He believes that film-makers who deal with film in a documentary style in terms of location present a kind of naturalism that is more appealing to intellectual audiences than some Hollywood films (Figgis, 2007).

### *Camera (movement and angle)*

As “camera movement has great significance as a determinant of the meaning of film” (Monaco 2009, p 108), Figgis and Kiarostami both consider it in their discussions about digital film-making. Monaco (2009) argues that camera movement is the most important characteristic of film in comparison to the stage because film-makers can control the viewer’s perspective. “The mobile frame changes the camera angle, level, height, or distance during the shot” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.195). To achieve these different perspectives, filmmakers may use several kinds of camera movement such as panning, tilting, tracking, dolly shots or crane shots.

Since the 1950s, following the production of a lighter camera by Arriflex, the hand-held method has become prevalent among film-makers, particularly in the realm of documentaries (Monaco, 2009). “The camera was now free of mechanical supports and consequently a more personal instrument. The French New Wave, in the early sixties, was noted for the creation of a new vocabulary of hand-held camera movements, and the lightweight camera made possible the style of *cinema-verite* documentary invented during the sixties and still common today.” (Monaco, 2009, p 109) Although the use of hand-held camera movements had grown with documentaries, it became common in fiction as well: “because the technique originated in documentary filming, it can lend an air of authenticity to pseudo-documentaries” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.196).

Despite the widespread usage of the hand-held method in digital film-making, made possible by lightweight cameras, Kiarostami and Figgis are not particularly enthusiastic about this method. Kiarostami, in particular, criticised the tendency to overuse this method by film-makers in classic works (Kiarostami, 2012). Figgis believes, "If you want to move the camera you have to have a very good reason why" (Figgis, 2007, p.85). He said that camera movement should aid storytelling. Figgis claims that he sometimes uses very constricted places for filming to control the actors, and he occasionally places his camera on a tripod in natural locations. However, he sometimes chooses the hand-held method for specific reasons. He states: "I will let the actors go where they want. In that instance, the camera is handheld so that I can follow them and create a dynamic between them and myself, the camera, which will empower them in some way" (Figgis, 2007, P.88).

Camera lens and angle are the other points to be considered for the analysis of the films in this chapter. Different kinds of lens expose different kinds of depth of field. For instance, wide-angle lenses have deep depths of field while telephotos have shallow depths of field (Sijll, 2005). The terms 'deep focus' and 'shallow focus' are related to these characteristics of lens and camera. Figgis believes that deep focus is one of the characteristics of digital cameras (Figgis, 2007). We can see this characteristic in the first generation of digital cameras in particular. "While there are a number of exceptions, deep focus is generally closely associated with theories of realism in film while shallow-focus photography, which welcomes the limitations of depth of field as a useful artistic tool, is more often utilized by expressionist film-makers" (Monaco, 2009, P.98). Kiarostami and Figgis both acknowledge the power of wide lens and digital camera for their approach to reality. Using deep focus when working with non-professional actors or when one expects a naturalistic reaction from an actor is necessary because the actor might easily go out of focus when shallow focus is used. Figgis also mentioned an effect of wide lenses in movement; he believes that "the nature of the wide angle means that it creates fluidity in its movement" (Figgis, 2007, P.91).

### *Lighting*

Although "the basic purpose of lighting is to manipulate and articulate our perception of the environment" by "the deliberate control of light" (Zettl, 2008,



p.20), I mainly emphasise natural lighting in this chapter due to the methods used by these three filmmakers in making realistic films. The 'natural light' approach became prevalent in 1960s and 1970s because of developments in lens speed and film emulsion (Viera & Viera, 2005). Then, the development of the digital camera and its light sensibility enabled another step towards the use of natural and available light in film. This development prompted filmmakers such as Figgis to criticise all use of artificial light, although some filmmakers like to control the light and display their art with it (Figgis, 2008).

In our investigation of Iranian films, we will discuss realistic settings and working with actual light in actual places. We will also point out how using the organic function in actual places makes places look realistic in some films. Organic function means that "the lighting should look organic, that is, approximate as closely as possible the actual illumination source shown in the scene, such as a candle, a window, a table lamp, or the sun" (Zettl 2008, p40). When filmmakers work in realistic settings and actual places, some critics believe that "available light may be (natural or artificial), it is the kind of illumination we have come to expect in the real world. Any form of stylized lighting approach is unrealistic and contrived, and diminishes the realism of the scene." (Millerson, 1991, p.245) Although using available light in actual places is a controversial topic, most of the films discussed in this chapter as part of Iranian Neorealism try to present or pretend this kind of lighting as "spring[ing] out of natural locations" (Viera & Viera, 2005, p.105).

### *Acting*

Kiarostami and Figgis both mention acting when explaining the new digital cinema that they are experiencing. As I will explain later, non-professional actors have significant roles in Kiarostami's cinema. We encounter different kinds of actors in the films. Some of them are professional and knowledgeable about the art of acting, while others are non-professionals who have some talent for acting and some physical advantages such as special face or voice. We also see actors who are untrained but act 'as their own characters' in the films; Kiarostami calls them non-actors. Kiarostami (2012) believes that digital cinema in Iran is improving the quality of acting, pushing it towards naturalistic and believable acting. He claims that this change can be traced even in professional actors, but his kind of acting is different from what Stanislavski

believed about acting in his method. He explains: "Just compare one of the actors of the 50s or 70s with ordinary actors of today. You can see the difference. If you are a fan of Stanislavsky and you come to cinema for acting, that acting is not acceptable" (Kiarostami, 2012). In his second interview with me, he emphasises the following: "I cannot tolerate watching some old movies just because of the kind of acting. The acting which I recognised as good acting seems feigned now." (Kiarostami, 2014)

Stanislavski believed that actors "were not live people but figures in a ritual". (Stanislavski, 1950, p.27) However, Kiarostami is looking for people who 'live rather than act'. Stanislavski asked actors to "love the role and create the capacity to build it" in them (Stanislavski, 1950, p.23). In Stanislavski's system, the physical actions are very important, as these are the way of building a character. "Stanislavski believed that tempo-rhythm was extremely vital in order to execute physical actions in a concrete and truthful manner" (Sawoski, 2011, p.16). He focuses on certain physical factors such as body language (expression), facial expression, diction and intonation, which are good factors to consider during the assessment of actors in this chapter. However, his idea of acting is theatrical and it differs from natural acting in Iranian neorealism. He asked actors to resist the temptation of being themselves to attract the audience. He said: "All we ask is that an actor on the stage lives in accordance with natural laws. Yet because of the circumstances amid which an actor has to do his work it is much easier for him to distort his nature than to live as a natural human being. So we have had to find means to struggle against this tendency toward distortion – that is the basis of our so-called 'system'" (Stanislavski, 1950, p.288). He asked actors to create an imaginary life based on given circumstances. In fact, he distinguishes 'scenic truth' from that "created automatically and on the plane of actual fact" (Stanislavski, 1936, p.128). It seems that Stanislavski's older method based on emotional memory is closer to what we see in the Iranian films discussed here. This method, which is called the 'American Method', is based on recalling memory from the past and regenerating it. Its practitioners changed the term 'emotional memory' to 'affective memory', which means "the conscious creation of remembered emotions which have occurred in the actor's own past life and then their application to the character being portrayed on stage" (Easte, 1996, p.52).

There is much controversy about this method as it can have some undesirable effects on actors and the results are sometimes not theatrical, contrary to what Stanislavski was expecting from such acting. In fact, actors, rather than using their imaginations to create characters, use their experience. Critics believe that this kind of acting is naturalistic but not artistic, and it looks like everyday life (Sawoski, 2011). However, this is exactly what we see in the films of Kiarostami and others, and they are proud of this when they work with non-professional actors.

Another point concerns the facility of digital cameras for recording any kind of acting, as mentioned by Figgis and Kiarostami. Figgis believes that what actors “love is the moment of interaction with another actor and a camera. So what you want to do is give them as many opportunities as possible to do that” by using digital cameras and not wasting our time with lighting and the fear of the limitation of the raw material (Figgis, 2007, p.103). Kiarostami also believes in these advantages as well as the size of small digital cameras, which do not disturb non-professional actors, allowing them to be themselves rather than being influenced by the atmosphere of filming. Figgis believes that reducing the number of times the camera is switched off and having more takes increases the chance of better acting. Figgis and Kiarostami both believe in the power of “Okay let’s see what they can do” (Figgis, 2007, p.106) in front of camera and then adjusting the work, making it better and more natural.

### *Directing*

“Directing means developing the skills and persuasion to make everybody give of their very best. It involves thinking, feeling, and acting like a director from the first idea through to the final cut” (Rabiger 2008 p5). Hence, directors deal with all the cast and crew and manage everything towards the final goal. Particularly in the realm of independent film, such as the Iranian films discussed in this chapter, directors are sometimes completely involved in different aspects of the film, from filming, acting and set design to lighting. Kiarostami mentions certain French terms standing for director: *metteur en scene* is someone who gives the order to film, while *realisateur* is someone who realises or materialises something (Kiarostami, 2004). However, he believes, in his work on digital films such as *Ten*, that he is neither of these. He believes that, in these kinds of films, he simply records reality and gives it shape by omitting part of it. Although

*realisateur* is a common term meaning director, there are some debates around the term *metteur en scene* in cinema. It literally means scene setter in English and be described as “a label that conveyed technical competence without a strong individual vision” (Corrigan and White, 2012, p.411). Truffaut’s (1954) idea of *metteur en scene* differs from others: “The *metteur-en-scene* are and wish to be responsible for the scenarios and dialogues they illustrate” (Truffaut, 1954). However, for some scriptwriters, “when they hand in their scenario, the film is done; the *metteur-en-scene*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it” (Truffaut, 1954). He also mentions “auteurs who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct” (Truffaut, 1954). In this chapter, we encounter a different kind of directing. In fact each director defines his own role in making his films. We rely on the films and interviews with the directors to discover exactly what happens during the making of these films and what methods the directors employ.

In this chapter, we are mainly investigating directors known as authors (Kiarostami, Panahi and Ghobadi), and we assess their role in making films in order to determine the extent to which they deal with and change the real world in order to produce their work. We also explore how they represent reality, and what defines the difference between their digital works and their previous work.

## *Reduction of directorial role: A Comparison between Taste of Cherry and Ten*

*Taste of Cherry* (1997) is one of the most famous films by Kiarostami; it won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1997. The story concerns a middle-aged man named Mr Badii, who wants to commit suicide. He roams the suburbs of Tehran in his car to find someone to help him in this enterprise. He asks a soldier, a seminarist (theology student) and some workers but none of them accept his plea. Finally, an old man named Mr Bagheri, who works in a museum, accepts his offer due to his financial problems; at the same time, however, he tries to change Mr Badii's mind with a speech about the beauty of life. *Taste of Cherry* was made in 35mm.

*Ten* (2002), the second digital film by Kiarostami, was among the official selections at the Cannes Film Festival of 2002. *Ten* is about Mania, a woman driving through the crowded city of Tehran. She gives rides to other women and, at the same time, she is involved in her own family affairs concerning her son, Amin, who is living with her ex-husband. During the film, Mania meets her sister, a girl who has fallen in love, a religious old woman, a prostitute, and a broken-hearted girl in her car. The main conversation takes place between Mania and her son, Amin, and the film starts and ends with this conversation.

### *Subject*

The main subject of Kiarostami's film is human beings and their communication with society and nature. However, we find a significant change in approach to this subject in *Ten*. The subject of *Taste of Cherry* is a man who is suffering from depression and is looking for an ordinary person to help him commit suicide, but the subject of *Ten* is "everyday life" in all its simplicity and complexity.

According to Kiarostami's notion, digital films allow filmmakers to show the real world as it seems without the fear of stating something dull. "The subject of *Ten* is about everyday life" (Kiarostami, 2004), including its wide range of problems

and petty incidents. In contrast, in *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami tries to focus on a man who is the main character (Mr Badii) and who seems isolated from people's everyday lives. Although we see all kinds of people passing through the scenes or talking with the main characters, the film does not try to present them as subjects. However, in *Ten*, every woman who is picked up by the main character (Mania) becomes a subject, with her problems, manner, faith and even reactions to accidents that occur as they drive through Tehran's streets. In other words, everyone who enters the main character's car in *Taste of Cherry* is overwhelmed by the main character's problems and depression, but everyone who is picked up by the woman in *Ten* brings their own subjects, ideas and worldviews into the film. It seems that digital technology acts as an impartial surveillance camera, providing some intimacy for everyone who enters the scene and encouraging them to offer themselves as a subject. In conclusion, I can claim that *Taste of Cherry* and most of Kiarostami's pre-digital works needed a story or try to present specific narrow subjects related to the life of people. However, digital film allows Kiarostami to talk about real life with a wide range of stories and characters. In fact, showing a subject such as everyday life without using a story seems more realistic because the film-maker demotes the story in favour of real world incidents.

### *Script*

*Taste of Cherry*, like other works by Kiarostami, has no full written script and a three-page synopsis (Kiarostami, 2004). We can detect a storyline in this film based on this synopsis. In *Ten*, we can barely discern a storyline. *Ten* appears to be shaped around an idea that Kiarostami mentioned in *10 on Ten* (2004). This idea is innovative and attractive enough to enable the director to freely show the scene and ensure the consequences of his work.

In contrast, every part of *Taste of Cherry* is designed like a film with a storyline. This means that the story has a main role in the film, and we can imagine a kind of script for this film. This means that Kiarostami had a script structure and added to it during the filming according to what was happening and what existed in his mind. This process of storytelling is often used in modern Iranian neorealism films. In this case, even if the plot or synopsis is unrealistic and influenced by the ideological background of the author or director, the events and incidents, as well as the reactions and dialogues, are based on reality.

However, In *Ten* we can see a more tangible reality as there is no distinct story injected by the director. Then we can discover a considerable step toward reality. We should not assess Kiarostami's script against the benchmark of classic mainstream scripts; however, we can find certain points and structural similarities which are comparable to classic ones.

I should explain more about Kiarostami's approach to reality by using certain scripts and actors in his digital works. When we talk about a closer approach to reality or finding 'more tangible reality', we are not talking about a certain level. We are just trying to compare two realistic methods of film-making with each other. Later, in the section on actors, I mention how Kiarostami dealt with his actors in *Taste of Cherry*. The actors did not have a strong bond with the script and the other actors, and Kiarostami manipulates those actors in some scenes in order to deliver his message. However, there is a closer bond between the script and actors (in particular, the mother and son) in *Ten*. Kiarostami sometimes just provoked an emotion in an actor. For example, Kiarostami provoked the anger of Amin before the scene (Gow 2006) in order to help the actor express himself more aggressively in front of his real mother in a story which he can understand and engage with. This level of provocation is closer to realistic acting compared to what happens to the soldier in front of the camera and the director in films like *Taste of Cherry*.

In *Taste of Cherry*, we see an introduction that lasts until 10:15; this acts like a hook and grabs the audience's attention, a technique normally used in classic and mainstream films. In minute 26, the audience has grasped the subject of the film and the main challenge. However, we have no ordinary protagonist or antagonist. In addition Andrew states: "Kiarostami is not known for conventional dramatic climaxes" (Andrew, 2005, p.42). However, we can see a sort of inner climax in the main actor at minute 1:23:00 although we have no back story through which to judge Mr Badii. In fact, the script invites the audience to think about life itself and confront some real ideas about it. This kind of story invites the audience to pursue every speech by the characters as a story or, in fact, as part of reality.

In *Ten*, the film-maker liberates himself from any storyline in the script and wants to "simply show the reality" (Kiarostami, 2004). Of course this is a

cinematic reality that is close to the real world. The viewer may try to find some script element at beginning of the film, but when he/she becomes involved with the actors' real lives, he/she finds himself/herself in a car, seeing people's lives. Kiarostami explains: "There are basically two kinds of storytelling. One's direct, very eventful, like a serial. The other's about looking at something and finding something in it for yourself" (Andrew, 2005, p.57). The hook or motivation of the script and the film are the acting and the speech of the actors. Andrew (2005) points to the ninth chapter (signalled by the number 2 appearing on screen, in the film) as the climax of *Ten*, but he also mentions the intense argument between Mania and her son in the first chapter of the film (signaled by number 10) as a kind of climax, while I consider it 'the hook' of the film. In terms of the ending of the script, "10 doesn't end with the world changing or Mania finding her situation improved. But it does send her on a journey to 'see what it's like', and she is determined to be herself insofar as life allows"(Andrew, 2005, p.69).

The special script structure of *Ten* inspired a lot of debates and critiques, as I mentioned in the literature review, and while they do not directly affect our discussion of the representation of reality, they still need some explanation in this section. *Ten* is made up of 10 sequences or scenes separated by captions, labelled by a number from 10 to 1. This means that the first scene is number 10 and the last one is number 1. As Ganz and Khatib point out, "Each sequence stands alone and can be understood as a whole piece of art, yet viewed together, the sequences take us on a ride into the inner lives of Iranian women" (2006, p.30).

Munt considers each scene of the film as a distinct 'module'. He believes that, "in *Ten*, compositional principles of repetition and variation are evident at both the macro-scale (the order, duration and repetition of story modules) and micro-scale (variation of film language within a single module)" (Munt, 2006). He uses a diagram (Figure 1) to illustrate his idea and argues that the structure of *Ten* can be read based on Manovich's (2001) theory about the modularity of digital media. Manovich mentions modularity and variability among the key principles of digital media. He explains: "media elements, be it images, sounds, shapes, or behaviours, are represented as collections of discrete samples (pixels, polygons, voxels, characters, scripts). These elements are assembled into larger-scale objects but they continue to maintain their separate identity. The



objects themselves can be combined into even larger objects -- again, without losing their independence.” (Manovich, 2001, p.51) He also described variability in digital media as follows: “a new media object is not something fixed once and for all but can exist in different, potentially infinite, versions” (Manovich, 2001, p.56). Munt assumes that “the digital cinema of *Ten* conforms to ‘new media’ logic [...] as a series of media objects (ten narrative modules) assembled into a larger-scale object (the feature film)” (Munt, 2006).

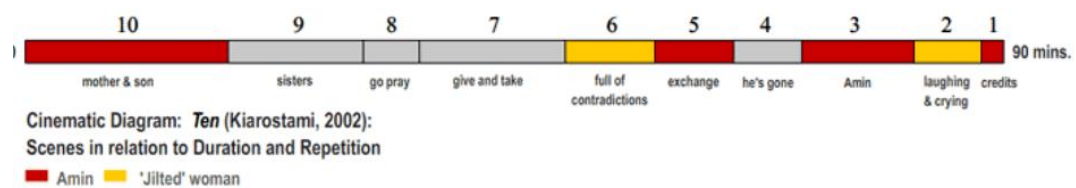


Figure 1: Cinematic Diagram of *Ten* (MUNT 2006)

In terms of specific elements, we find the usage of self-reflexivity in the controversial final scene of *Taste of Cherry* which is a continuation of the trend of using self-reflexivity in Kiarostami's pre-digital work, but we cannot detect any kind of self-reflexivity, even as a proxy, in *Ten*. Although some critics try to present Mania in the role of the director, there is no evidence for this. Mania is a mother and a kind of psychiatric practitioner, as Kiarostami explains in his interviews (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003). In the final scene of *Taste of Cherry*, we see the director, Kiarostami, who directs the last scene of the film. As Naficy believes, “self-reflexivity, in the process of making film, is incorporated into films, breaking the spectatorial illusion of witnessing a seamless and authorless real world” (Naficy, 2012, p.193). By referring to self-reflexivity, Naficy also points out another specification of Kiarostami's pre-digital works which I can highlight as another difference between *Ten* and *Taste of Cherry*. He claims that the “shot of the crew and the director working – that is, self-reflexivity – underscores the process of research filming” (Naficy, 2012, p.208). Naficy believes that some of Kiarostami's work resembles research done by a camera. He explains: “Narratively, some of his films resemble the search phase of the research process, in that a single-minded character on some mission frequently asks others for the way to their destination.” (Naficy,

2012, pp.207-208) However, we do not find this structure in *Ten* or any self-reflexivity related to it. On the other hand, self-reflexivity increases the feeling of involvement in something real in Kiarostami's works. But in his digital work, he feels he does not need to raise the audience's consciousness in this way for a conception of reality because what he has made (the film) is closer to 'the truth' than his pre-digital films. In fact, this kind of digital film-making provides audiences with something for which they do not need self-reflexivity to prove. In the other words, in *Taste of Cherry*, because of the script, acting and even the camera angles, Kiarostami uses self-reflexivity to show the audience he is a truthful person and does not want to deceive audiences; thus, he shows us behind the scenes and the process of filming and also his inevitable situation as a director of a 35 mm film. However, in *Ten*, Kiarostami believed that realistic acting, lengthy dialogue without cuts, a camera on the dashboard and the method of filming would convince the audience that what happens in the film is very close to the real world (truth), and the director has minimised his effect on it. Therefore, there was no place for self-reflexivity. In fact, what was self-reflexivity for Kiarostami? He is saying that the film is transparent and truthful, and the audience should know that he is directing the actors and film, but in *Ten* he wants to deliver the message that he is not directing the actors and that they are in fact acting in his absence, as he claimed in several interviews.

Munt (2006) and Dale (2008) point out the usage of repetition in the narrative of *Ten*. They highlight the analysis carried out on the script of *Ten* and divide it into ten separate parts (or segments) as performed by Andrew (2005). Munt (2006) and Dale (2008) argue that this kind of open screenplay is shaped by repetition and this type of symmetry can be a kind of new model for digital film; at the same time, they believe that this model is influenced by graphics and design, which is Kiarostami's second profession. So, on the one hand, we can note that repetition is rooted in Iranian design and architecture as well. On the other hand, digital film-making provides sufficient material for Kiarostami and helps him to use designs for his script without any fear of drifting far from the reality of his subjects. This means he has enough confidence to shape the narrative by omission (as he claims in *10 on Ten*) and still uses elements such as repetition in his narrative to shape his reality in a more artistic way.

Improvisation has a big role in *Taste of Cherry* but a vital role in *Ten*. Based on information from and interviews with Kiarostami and his actors, which we will explain in the acting section, it is apparent that making *Ten* without improvisation, would have been impossible because improvisation provides the first material for the film-maker to shape into a film, while in *Taste of Cherry* the script was not open and the actors simply improvised in response to Kiarostami's questions to achieve a more realistic reaction. Therefore, improvisation is the main aspect of Kiarostami's digital work, while in his previous work and in Iranian pre-digital cinema it was just an element, as Naficy (2011a) claims.

### *Location*

Most of *Taste of Cherry* takes place in a car that is roaming around a mountainous suburb of Tehran. As Kiarostami claimed in *10 on Ten* (2004), his "favourite location is the car". The car in *Taste of Cherry* is situated in mountains out of town, which is another of Kiarostami's favourite locations. The film uses many external shots to show the picturesque view of the mountains and Tehran from above. We have some other shots out of the car in the mountains and the museum on the hill. However, in *Ten*, a sedan car is the only location and we see surrounding things through its windows and in the background. This means that the unique location of *Ten* is a car. It was an ambition of Kiarostami to use this location for an entire film, and he achieved his aim thanks to the digital camera and its affordances. He believes that *mise en scene* diminishes in digital films (Kiarostami 2012) and that is why he does not call himself a *metteur en scene*. If we do not accept this notion in most works, we can at least find it in *Ten*. Because of the unique location of a car, a director does not have to design anything; he merely has to direct.

Kiarostami, having spent a long time shooting in villages and suburbs, returned to the crowded urban location of Tehran. It seems that the digital camera can protect him from unrealistic scenes and acting here because small digital cameras have less effects on people and atmosphere, as we explain in the following sections.

## *Acting*

Kiarostami's method in using non-professionals and non-actors in films began with his first works, and it can be traced through most of his films. "Kiarostami's Method keeps the characterisation firmly within the realm of plausibility. That is partly a matter of having non-professional actors 'play' themselves - characters and dialogue are closely derived from reality. But it is also a matter of how the film was shot and edited" (Andrew, 2005, p.48). The main actor in *Taste of Cherry*, Mr Badii, is a non-professional and he tries to represent a depressed middle-class man who is suffering from major depression and wants to commit suicide. However, the main character in *Ten* is Mania, a stereotype of the normal Iranian middle class woman, in her everyday life.

When we start to discuss the main characters, we should mention their gestures, facial expressions and body language. The role of the woman in *Ten* is more complicated than that of the man in *Taste of Cherry* because, on the one hand, most of the women express themselves and their problems and try to elicit sympathy from the audience while most of the men in *Taste of Cherry* simply try to react to the main actor or discuss his problem. On the other hand, the task of representing a real, ordinary person who is facing the real problems of ordinary life was beyond the capabilities of many old-fashioned actors in Iranian pre-digital films. Kiarostami (2012), in his interview with the author, mentions a famous Iranian star (he did not intend to reveal his name) who gave unacceptable performances in pre-digital films compared to his recent work, which shows that he does not believe in that kind of pre-digital acting.

Considering the different moods of these two characters, if we focus on the first parts of the films as an introduction to the main characters in order to assess the acting of the two roles, we will find an obvious difference. The man in *Taste of Cherry* has a cold, depressed face with no appreciable facial expressions. He talks in a monotonous voice without using any body language or applying different gestures in his acting. He does not even react to the road. The only noticeable feature of his face as he drives is his eyes glancing curiously at people in order to find something. He maintains a depressed-looking face, (16:54-25:00) and, for a few seconds at minute 50, Badii changes his facial expression, betraying a shaking in his voice, almost crying but managing to control himself. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Badii's facial expression in *Taste of Cherry* (50:05)

In *Ten* the audience is introduced to the main character by her voice; she is a mother who is trying to be calm and kind but is failing to control her anger and starting to shout. Her voice is full of up-and-down intonations, such as those delivered by very professional actors. She can illustrate her emotions by her voice and affect her audience (her son). From 16:54 her face appears to the audience. She is a young woman in casual dress. She uses her face and body to react to everything in the scene in a naturalistic way. She reacts to the street and the people, and appears to be an active person. As Krzych recognizes, "the act of driving directly influences the dialogue" (Krzych, 2010, p.34) because it was a real action without interference from the filming equipment and the director's orders. Her gesture as a driver when she guides another driver out of a parking space is completely natural. She displays all the reactions that a person would normally present in this situation (18:00). She wears sunglasses, which may be hiding some of her emotions as a character during the early scenes of the film (until minute 25.) However, her reactions and facial gestures when she tries to park her car (minute 18 and 24) are naturalistic and convincing (Figure 3). These kinds of reactions are usually ignored by most actors and directors. Such petty reactions and gestures can convince audiences

that the actress is someone like them, with all things they experience in their everyday lives.



Figure 3: Mania's facial gesture in *Ten* (24:30)

In comparing these two characters, I should mention that, in the introduction to *Taste of Cherry* (until minute 12), it is the story that invites us into the film, rather than the man through his acting. In this introduction we see a man looking for someone to do something weird. This introduction raises some questions: Who is he? What is he looking for? Is he a homosexual looking for a partner, or is he a killer or a psycho? Meanwhile, in the first scene of *Ten*, the actors alone invite us to watch the film through their intimate acting. The discussion between the son and his mother in the first scene of the film is very challenging and attractive.

Andrew (2005), based on investigative interviews with Kiarostami and Mania Akbari about *Ten*, concludes: "Kiarostami wanted them to be in the right emotional state in order to bring naturalism to their discussion of a particular subject" (Andrew, 2005, p.37). I should emphasise that what we realise and discuss about acting in these two films is partially related to the character and the role. Thus, we cannot expect a depressed man to react to the surrounding

atmosphere in the same way as a normal, active woman would; however, we cannot deny the natural, realistic acting of *Ten*'s main character.

We should mention the use of body language by Mr Badii at 42:42 and his reaction to the road at 35:50 in *Taste of Cherry*. Moreover, we notice a change in his voice and face when he expresses anxiety in his last dialogue with Mr Bagheri between minutes 1:21:50 and 1:24:23. In fact, this is when his character experiences its inner climax.

We now compare the function and acting styles of the supporting roles in both films.

The young soldier who gets in the car is one of the few supporting roles in *Taste of Cherry*. He is clearly a shy young man, as shown by his eyes with their rapid glances and his voice that sometimes becomes very low and unclear, thus suggesting the unease of his character. This character, like the main character, shows no changes in his facial expressions and gestures until the end of his appearance. As he is a non-actor, one senses that he is simply reacting to the heavy shadow of the huge 35 mm camera instead of Mr Badii, and his glance when he meets the lens line may have been guided by the director telling him not to look at the lens. However, these methods succeeded in presenting his character as a young, shy, rural soldier. On the other hand, his voice, which sometimes becomes unclear and hesitant, is highly effective in showing his character. I will explain more about Kiarostami's method in this section later, referring to Naficy's (2012) ideas about *Taste of Cherry*.

When we consider the supporting roles in *Ten*, we can appreciate the digital camera's function of "not disturbing" the non-actors' real behaviour (Kiarostami, 2004). The young boy, Amin, appears to be an aggressive child when he talks to his mother. He uses facial expression, body language and a strong, lively voice to represent his character. He pays no attention to the camera, as though it does not exist, and everything he presents appears natural and just as one might experience in real life. If we focus on his reaction to his mother's words, when he ignores her speech, we note that he becomes noisy and starts to shout (from 4:30 minute); this naturalistic acting refers to statements by Kiarostami and other critics (Andrew, 2005) (Figure 4). He uses his body to express his ideas frequently but not in an exaggerated way. As Kiarostami puts this



performance at the beginning of his film and does not cut into it with other shots, we can see how impressive it is. He reacts to everything surrounding him and, since the location is a moving car, we can observe realistic acting. He reacts to streets and people very naturally and immediately and in such a way that the viewer believes in him as a real person, not as an actor. Ganz and Khatib explain this kind of acting based on their idea about unclear boundaries between the spaces behind and in front of the camera in this kind of digital film-making. They believe that “The elision of the boundaries between the space in front and behind the camera means that the actors participate in the making of the film in a different way. The boundaries between the actor as person and the actor in performance become less clear when all can be recorded and edited into the finished film” (Ganz and Khatib, 2006, p.27).



Figure 4: Amin's body and facial expression in *Ten* (07:00)

In comparison to *Taste of Cherry*, the youngest actor in *Ten*, Amin, engages the audience with his acting. In fact, the soldier in *Taste of Cherry* simply helps the story to move on, whereas Amin is the story himself. I mean that Amin's character and his acting (as well as his mother and the other women) shape the



story and attract the audience to follow the film. Although we are looking at two different characters (Amin and the soldier) in these films, we cannot deny the role of acting in expressing those characters. Even if we look at other pre-digital works by Kiarostami, we can see the value of impressive acting in the case of Amin. Sabzian in *Close Up* is the main character of the story. He does not shape the story; there is a story about fraud and Sabzian acts as the main character (although we know he is acting as himself). However, in *Ten* Kiarostami designs his film and edits it based on the acting of Amin, his mother and the others. This means that, at this level, we do not discuss the characters. We discuss the extent to which a kind of acting can be realistic and close to real-world behaviour and thus whether it is attractive to audiences.

We can also follow this attitude in observing other actors in *Ten*. When we meet the sister of the main character, the film spends a considerable amount of time (18:50-20:34 and 24:45-25:50) showing her reaction to the atmosphere of the location and the film (Figure 5). Perhaps this is a way of assuring the audience that her character is a real woman rather than a celebrated actress. She simply lives (rather than acts) in the boring atmosphere of an urban area. She expresses what everyone experiences: traffic jams or waiting for something, everyday life in Tehran. Andrew believes that “such ‘dead moments’ enhance the impression of documentary authenticity, and make us believe in the woman as more than just a character type” (Andrew, 2005, p.48). Then she begins to act like a real woman, leading a dialogue with her sister and at the same time watching the street for potholes and reacting to them. When the car hits a pothole (27:50-28:05), she reacts completely normally to this accident. This scene was used as an example of natural acting in *10 on Ten*.



Figure 5: Mania's sister's reaction to the atmosphere of the location when she is alone (19:02)

Returning to *Taste of Cherry*, we encounter an actor with the ability to talk and use body language with some facial expressions, the old non-actor Mr Bagheri. However, he does not react to the road and surroundings when he is talking to the main actor.

Considering the face of the supporting actor in *Taste of Cherry*, I believe that what we identify as a shadow of fear from talking to a mad, depressed man is in fact the fear of the 35 mm camera in front of which the actor must perform. Therefore, it is the ability of the director that generates these feelings, not the ability of the actors. As Naficy explains, “[Kiarostami] recognizes that provocation is a key filming technique for him” (Naficy, 2012, p.203). Kiarostami himself confesses that, in *Taste of Cherry*, “I was able to provoke them and seize them at the right moment” (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.125). In the next section about directorial methods I explain Kiarostami's method of working with each actor in his pre-digital films. Naficy comments about *Taste of Cherry*, based on his interview with Kiarostami in 2001, that “these shots are all filmed without the driver and passenger ever being present together in the car. Each time that one person is on camera, Kiarostami occupies the other front seat” (Naficy, 2012, p.191). Based on that fact, Rosenbaum believes that, “In the case of *Taste of Cherry*, one clear if subliminal effect of working with each

actor in isolation is to create a powerful sense of solitude that is felt throughout the film” (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.31). Naficy theoretically explains this method as follows: “In a sly subversion of the codes of realism and neorealism, the protagonists are forced to react not to each other, as is customary in this style, but to the director next to them, a presence that insinuates Kiarostami’s authorial control in each profilmic scene, as he coaches the cast and feeds them lines of dialogue” (Naficy, 2012, p.191).

The two desperate girls in *Ten* represent real reactions by different Iranian girls to the same incident, and their ability to express themselves. At the same time, one notices the digital camera’s ability to avoid disturbing their feelings as non-actors. The first one (who acts in two sections of the film) is a cool, emotional girl who is engaged to someone at a critical point in her life, finally becoming separated. At minutes twenty-four and twenty-five, we see her reaction to this new situation. Her facial expression, especially between 1:24:30 and 1:25:50, is very natural, and we rarely see this kind of crying and smiling by professional Iranian actors (Figure 6). In contrast, Leila, another girl suffering from a broken relationship, is crying and expressing her feelings very impassionedly. However, her facial expression is vague compared to her strong voice, which she utilises realistically between minutes 1:03:45 and 1:09:04.



Figure 6: The desperate girl crying and smiling in *Ten* (1:50:00)

The seminarist, the young man in *Taste of Cherry*, is the last but certainly not the least important character that I will discuss. He represents a seminarist as well as a self-confident clergyman, although he is very young. Unlike most of the actors in this film, he reacts to the surrounding atmosphere in last second of minute forty-seven, thus showing that he is aware of his role and that nothing will disturb his acting. However, he does not use facial expressions and body language.

To sum up, as Kiarostami claims, the acting in his work is different from Stanislavski's notion (Kiarostami 2012). In the case of *Taste of Cherry*, Mulvey states: "here Mr Badii becomes the medium for the director's questioning rather than a character within a coherent fiction dressed in the trappings of verisimilitude" (Mulvey, 1998, p.26). However, natural acting, which might be considered boring, is sometimes more acceptable and believable for the audience. Actors act like our real lives. Mania and Amin are mother and son in real life, and such a background enhances their acting. However, as Kiarostami mentioned, this does not mean they are completely real; it is a kind of reality that is close to the 'truth' (Kiarostami, 2004). The digital camera has removed the obstacle of natural acting for non-actors by minimising the size of the film crew etc. Thus, the soldier can act differently in front of the digital camera, and such acting may be closer to his natural behaviour. Therefore, this cinematic reality *seems* closer to 'the truth'.

In this comparison between the actors in these two films, we should take two things into consideration; firstly, with regard to sex and gender differences, all the actors in *Taste of Cherry* are male whereas in *Ten* all of them are women (except Amin). In terms of using non-actors, the director relies on the personality and emotions of the persons who act, and the ability of these specific women in expressing their emotions on screen are significant. However, we should not assess the natural performances of the actors in *Ten* based on their gender and reduce the role of digital film-making because we can find some women in previous pre-digital films of Kiarostami whose performances are like those of other pre-digital actors in his films. Of course, Mulvey (2002) and Naficy (2012) both point out this change (using women and their lives) in Kiarostami's new films but neither of them claim that this produces significant changes in the performances in these films as much as the use of

digital cameras. Secondly, with regard to dialect and ethnicity, all the actors in *Ten* are from urban areas of Tehran and use urban dialects; however, in *Taste of Cherry* we see different people with different ethnicities and dialects. Special dialects can cover up the shortage of non-actors to express emotions through dialogue. For example, when Mr Bagheri talks in Persian with a Turkish dialect, since his first language is Turkish, the audience can dismiss the grammatical errors in his dialogue as part of his natural character. The same is true for the Afghan Seminarist and the young Kurdish soldier. In addition, there are sometimes delays between the actors' replies to each other or delays between sentences. These delays occur when an actor momentarily forgets his words or is not prepared for spontaneous acting. But the audience can accept this kind of delay and confusion as a kind of realistic acting by someone who needs to make a quick translation in his mind to express something to someone else in another language. Mr Kiarostami pointed out the usage of dialect in *Close Up* in his interview with the author. He said: "Mr Ahankhah was a little bit bossy and talked very posh but I dealt with that because, first, he has a dialect..." (Kiarostami, 2014). In fact, for Kiarostami, having a Turkish dialect made the actor's performance realistic in *Close Up*. Thus, he probably used this technique again in his later works.

In pre-digital cinema, Kiarostami simply tried to present realistic ideas and speech by real people. His non-actors knew what they should say because their reactions and speech were derived from their real personalities; sometimes, however, they could not adapt their facial expressions and voices to these actions. In some cases, the voices became monotonous and without emotion. Kiarostami sometimes used methods to produce better acting in this regard (he explained these methods in interviews on his previous films), and we have mentioned it in *Taste of Cherry*. However, in digital cinema, Kiarostami discovered the ability of the digital camera to capture the real reactions of non-actors. In his new digital films, he not only continues to represent people's realistic thoughts and ideas but is also able to capture people's real actions. Thus, for first time in Kiarostami's films, the actors expressed unique real ideas with real expressions and acts. Notwithstanding Kiarostami's other works, the character of the actors is now as attractive as the story and speech. His representations of people are now closer to their real selves.

I should mention a final point about acting in Kiarostami's films. Showing time as it naturally passes for a character or showing the real-time acts of actors is one of the filmmakers' desires in artistic cinema because directors such as Kiarostami wish to share their experience of time with their audience. Kiarostami, who works with non-actors, found this more difficult compared to other directors due to the nature of acting when one works with non-professionals. However, the digital camera makes it easier because of the low cost of digital material and digital filmmaking.

### *Lighting*

In *Taste of Cherry*, we find nothing but natural lighting or, more accurately, a feeling of natural lighting. Filming in a car in sunny Tehran requires a filter and some kind of lighting in the car in order to expose everything in and out of car. In *Taste of Cherry*, the director tries to place the viewer in the car for most of the film; therefore, he has to prepare a naturalistic atmosphere for the audience.

Every passenger in a car can see other passengers as well as a view of daylight through the window. Kiarostami used lights and ND filters in *Taste of Cherry* to deal with the different levels of brightness in and out of car and to provide a realistic picture. As I mentioned earlier, most of the scenes in *Taste of Cherry* take place on a sunny afternoon, and the location is on a hill where one experiences a magnificent change in light between what one sees through the car's window and the character sitting in the car. From a technical point of view, dealing with this situation required professional lighting. In particular, in scenes such as 4:13-7:50 and 12:46-24:04, there is a half-open window in many shots, and film-makers cannot use any filters on windows; because of this situation, the lighting becomes more important and complicated (Figure 7). Whether shooting from inside or outside a car, the lighting problem is how to bring car interior levels up to avoid silhouetted actors or overexposed backgrounds (Viera and Viera, 2005, p.139). Had they used an ND filter on the window to control the outside natural light, the difference in brightness levels inside and outside would have revealed the usage of the filter. Thus, they put strong light behind the camera to balance the natural low-key lighting of the interior with the excessively bright exterior in order that the negative might expose both of them appropriately.



Figure 7: Lighting with half-open widows in *Taste of Cherry* (4:33)

In *Ten*, the camera was operating in the car for the whole film but we find some differences in the lighting in comparison to *Taste of Cherry*. First, the locations are mainly the streets of Tehran and the shadows of trees and buildings. Moreover, the contrast between outside and inside the car is less noticeable than in *Taste of Cherry*. Kiarostami explains the reason for choosing narrow streets: “mainly because the light was important. I didn’t want to show too much of what was happening outside the car, as I didn’t want viewers to become distracted” (Andrew, 2005, p.63). However, we see some high contrasts on faces in some parts (especially in the beginning, 00:32-01:20). We also experience an overexposure of the exterior in some scenes, for example after 01:20 (Figure 8).

This does not mean that Kiarostami is following the rules of *Dogme 95*<sup>3</sup>, for example, because in some scenes the effects of using filters are obvious (for example in the sixth part of the film on Mania’s window). This kind of filming is against the *Dogme 95* manifesto which specifies: “special lighting is not acceptable” and “optical works of filter are forbidden” (Von Trier et al., 2000, p.6). In this case, the sun is shining from Mania’s window but we do not see the high contrast on her face and we sometimes see her reflection in the window.

<sup>3</sup> *Dogme 95* was a movement in filmmaking began in 1995 by two filmmakers; Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg . I will discuss their style and ideas in the directing section.



This means that Kiarostami has devised his own rules for this film based on what disturbs actors and what does not. Thus, for Amin, a child who needs an active atmosphere, the windows are open and he interacts with the outside, but for Mania, who is focusing on driving, this is not necessary. Even the actions of Amin at minute 09:15, when he protects his face from the sun, seem like a natural reflex to irritating sunshine. Therefore, the most important aim is to be natural and avoid disturbing the acting with lighting.

In conclusion, the use of lighting equipment in *Ten* is limited to that which is portable and not disturbing to the actors, whereas in *Taste of Cherry*, aesthetics is the first priority for Kiarostami. Thus, in *Taste of Cherry* Kiarostami used filters and artificial lighting equipment in order to present a naturalistic view but in *Ten* he sometimes had to sacrifice the aesthetics of realistic lighting in order to achieve naturalistic and believable acting and story. He shows a concern for aesthetics as long as it does not disturb the actors.



Figure 8: Overexposing outdoors in *Ten* (03:13)

### *Camera (Movement and angle)*

There are certain differences between film cameras and digital video cameras apart from size and restriction of the materials, and Kiarostami was aware of this when he replaced film cameras with digital cameras in his work. He states:



"White and bright colours create problems. For close-ups, this camera is fantastic" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaun, 2003, p.121). However, Kiarostami does not restrict his attitude to technical issues. He explains: "When I say '35mm camera', I'm not just referring to the machine itself, but to what it brings with it - the whole crew. That's the kind of thing that's not for me or the kind of movies that I make. I like to work with this much smaller camera, which is more intimate and more immediate" (Elena, 2005, p.174). Ganz and Khatib (2005) try to explain the intimacy of digital video cameras which Kiarostami mentioned. They point out the usage of home videos in people's lives: "Video is demotic. We have probably seen ourselves on video; we do not know how we look on 35mm film. On film we look at other people. On video we watch ourselves" (Ganz and Khatib, 2005, p.34). According to Kiarostami's statement above, he was completely aware of the intimacy and immediacy brought by new media. He also seems to know the artistic potential of digital video for capturing and representing intimacy (Hirschfeld, 2011).

In comparison, the first thing to consider about the camera before talking about other aspects is the number of cameras used in a film. Because of the camera angle in the shots we will discuss later, *Taste of Cherry* used one camera in each scene, although one can see a second camera in a corner of a scene in part 3 of *Ten*. The usage of the two cameras in *Ten* is made possible by the nature of the digital camera as a small, portable camera and Kiarostami's method of using non-professional actors. In other words, small digital cameras with their cheap tapes enable Kiarostami to use two cameras (one for each character); the actors are also able to relax and talk to each other, as there is no filming pressure. However, the bulky 35 mm camera and the limited film cassettes precluded the use of two cameras in *Taste of Cherry*. Instead, the director used other techniques to guide his actors, as well as more artistic camera angles.

In *Taste of Cherry*, the camera is at the eye level of the characters in the indoor car shots (see Figure 9 for an example). Moreover, Kiarostami tries to obtain the best aesthetic shot by placing the camera at an angle that covers the passenger's or driver's window and using a lens that is wide enough to provide a clear background without distorting our view of the characters. Although this camera angle makes it difficult for an actor to imagine his audience, as we

discussed in relation to the young soldier's acting, it creates a good, still picture in term of composition, colour and light. However, in *Ten*, Kiarostami discards these factors in favour of producing better acting and reactions.



Figure 9: Camera level and angle in *Taste of Cherry* (47:19)

In *Ten*, Kiarostami places two cameras in the centre of the dashboard positioned at approximately 90 degrees. He uses a wide lens, which covers the activities of the characters and presents a clear picture from outside of the car. He must have decided to use wider lenses, firstly, because he wanted to show the outside of the car and the street (usage of deep focus) and, secondly, because the camera is too close to the characters' faces and a normal lens would not have been able to cover the characters' activity and the atmosphere. In fact, although the small digital camera solved some of the problems, the desire to use two cameras makes the situation slightly difficult in terms of aesthetics. As a result, in *Ten*, we are faced with low-level wide shots instead of eye-level, conventional shots (Figure 10). In fact, these changes (camera angles and levels) are meaningful in this context. In a recent interview, the director emphasised the aesthetics of the picture, even when using digital cameras (Kiarostami 2012).



Figure 10: Camera level and angle in *Ten* (51:08)

In *Taste of Cherry*, there are some shots out of the car from 1:19:04 until the end, as well as a few earlier shots giving an external view of the car. All these shots are achieved either with a static camera or by using pans or tilts on a tripod. Incidentally, there are no out-of-car shots in *Ten*. This shows Kiarostami's desire to make a film completely from inside his "favourite location" as we mentioned previously (Kiarostami 2004).

In conclusion, we can detect no significant differences in camera movements between the two films, whereas the camera angles *are* different in those two films. However, in *Ten*, the possibility of fixing small digital cameras in the car enabled the director to place the digital cameras in positions where the actors could act freely and naturally; they were thus freed from the cinematic rules about the directing line and looking at the lens. The two cameras on the dashboard were simply recording what the actors were performing. As the cameras were in low-level positions in-between the characters, the actors could look at each other without obstruction and in a seemingly natural way. This helped non-actors to 'live' in the film as though they were acting.

Munt (2006) points out another difference about car windows. He believes that, because of the angle and lens in a film such as *Taste of Cherry*, we can consider the car window as a 'frame within a frame' while in *Ten* the characters occupy more space and we can only partially watch the city.

## *Director*

Comparing *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten* in terms of directing is a little difficult, because they use such different methods of filmmaking and directing, as Kiarostami claimed in *10 on Ten* (2004). He claims he was not involved in *Ten* as a professional director. He referred to the French terms *metteur en scene* and *realisateur*, which explain the role of the film director as someone who realises or materialises something or gives orders to the cast and crew in order to make the film, whereas he claimed that he did none of these things in making these kinds of films. He admits his creative role in the film but not the details of it. He does not even include his name as director in the end credits of the film.

Therefore, to some extent, in *Ten* we are faced with a different kind of filmmaking that we have seen before in some of his films. He states that he made *Ten* not by adding to the scenes but by omitting things, which is similar to Kiarostami's reference to Robert Bresson in his interview: "we create not by adding but by subtracting" (Kiarostami, 2004). For example, Kiarostami reduces the number of shots and omits actors' points of view in this regard. Rosenbaum explains this notion as "the virtual absence of reverse angles in 10, 8 and 7" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, 2003, p.101) segments of the film. He actually points out the visual absence of the old woman in part 7, the prostitute in part 8 and Mania in part 10 until Amin gets out of the car. He believes these omissions "give all three of these characters a special kind of weight in these segments that they wouldn't have if they were visible" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum, 2003, p.101).

However, in *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami appears to work as a conventional director. As we mentioned earlier in the sections on light and acting, he is involved in everything in his film in order to produce a believable, natural view of 'the truth' he is trying to convey. On the other hand, in the absence of a complete script, he must have been more creative and active during filming because he will have been sensitive to and aware of any action of cast and crew during filming in order to use certain special moments and record them as part of his work in connection with the real world. He claims in *10 on Ten* (2004) that, as a director, he has discarded worldly reality in order to make cinematic reality that is close to the 'truth' in his view. However, his efforts to make this reality are different in *Ten* and *Taste of Cherry*. In *Taste of Cherry*, he tried to

create scenes that were close to the real world and real people and, as the director, he was involved in different aspects of the film to shape this view. In *Ten* however, his role was simply to organise the scenes generally, and then record the reality created in front of the camera; as he claimed, through subtraction he made his own cinematic reality. Therefore, the details of the film seem more natural and closer to the real world.

Kiarostami explains: "In this form of cinema, the director is more like a football coach. He has to do most of his work before the take starts" (Elena, 2005, p.175). He also claims to have been absent in scenes and to have followed them in another car (Elena, 2005). Naficy, explaining the method of the director in *Taste of Cherry*, provides a better understanding of the different types of directing in these two films. He said: "Even when Kiarostami used the continuity filming and editing schemes of classic realism (and neorealism) cinema, such as shot-reverse-shot, he undermines them" (Naficy, 2012, p.191). He points out the absence of over-the-shoulder shots in *Taste of Cherry* and explains how Kiarostami filmed each actor in the absence of others and "coached the cast and fed them lines of dialogue" (Naficy, 2012, p.191). Naficy then reveals some false traditional attitudes to Kiarostami's pre-digital works. He explains: "His apparent casualness and improvisation, which consolidate his connection both to Italian neorealism and to the French new-wave films, is illusory. Nevertheless, the film is to a large extent improvisational". This is because Kiarostami often makes his films based on a few pages of script without any dialogue, and the actors improvise dialogue during the filming process. Naficy concludes: "These are manufactured improvisations of casualness and realism that he has striven hard to provoke, not innocent recordings of unfolding reality, as many believe. They conceal his considerable planning and tinkering with locations, prop arrangements, acting, dialogue coaching and filming" (Naficy, 2012, p.191).

The difference between these two films is the desire of the director to avoid using a lot of cinematic equipment and to try to return to the early days of cinema in *Ten*. As he claims in *10 on Ten* (2004), he objects to a new generation of filmmakers who merely focus on the equipment rather than life and the previous works of other filmmakers; *Ten* is a connection to real life using very simple equipment and a small crew. This may remind us of *Dogme*

95 film-making which I mentioned in the section on lighting. In fact Lars Von Trier and other *Dogme 95* film-makers are concerned about reality and the influence of equipment and capital on it. "The effect of rule number 8 ("genre movies are not acceptable") and related rules ("special lighting is not acceptable" and "optical work and filters are forbidden") is to free the prospective filmmaker from an increasingly naturalized obligation to see film as necessarily yoked to the cumbersome and, more important, expensive apparatus of mainstream filmmaking, Hollywood style" (Hojrot and Ebrary 2005, p.41). In fact, this idea is not new in film-making and art.

Kelly believes that "all revolutions in art mark a return to realism. In the other words, the bravest artists are ceaselessly borne back to a concern for what is truthful" (Kelly, 2000, p.10). Thus *Dogme 95* film-makers such as von Trier claim: "my supreme goal is to force the truth out of my character and setting" (Kelly, 2000, p.10). Kelly traces this idea back to Godard, who probably inspired both Von Trier and Kiarostami: "He favoured direct sound, natural sound, natural light, the teeming life of real streets, a smaller, more nimble production unit: all ways of helping him to find truth on the spur of the moment" (Kelly, 2000, p.12). However, in the case of *Ten*, Kiarostami does not issue cumbersome and odd rules for approaching the 'truth'. He simply removes all obstacles in the way of representing reality. Thus, when he recognised that controlling light in some scenes interfered with and threatened the realistic and natural performance of Mania's son, he ignored aesthetics in lighting and lets the sunshine generate a high contrast with Amin's face or overexposed the background. However, he closed the driver's window for Mania and put the filter on it because he was sure that it did not interfere with Mania's performance. The red line in Kiarostami's digital works is the representation of something implausible. Of course, he also takes care not to let the concern for capital, which is the bond with cinematic equipment, affect his work.

We might better understand the different type of directing in *Ten* when we know that "Kiarostami ended up with almost twenty-three hours' footage, and four or five more characters than appeared in the finished film, which he cut to run a little over one and a half hours" (Andrew, 2005, p.38). However, we are almost sure that the acceptable amount of footage for a film such as *Taste of Cherry* was four and a half hours due to the limited availability of film material in Iran.

Thus, Kiarostami claims: "I was more like an editor than a director" (Andrew, 2005, p.38). This shows that it is possible for someone else to edit a film such as *Taste of Cherry*, but the editing is part of the directing role in films such as *Ten*, as the film is shaped entirely during the editing. Therefore, in the case of digital movies such as *Ten*, the role of the director in post-production is vital compared to previous films, and the film is generated by the editing process to some extent.

I should mention the views of Dale (2008) and Krzych (2010) about the partial authorship of the car as a technological machine in *Ten*, as I point out in the literature review. They believe that the car as a machine rather than a location can shape the film besides the director because they think that Kiarostami freed the characters in the car, letting them choose any routes they wanted and then editing the consequences. I reject this idea about *Ten* because of Kiarostami's statements about making *Ten* in different interviews mentioned in Elena's book (2005) and by Andrew (2005), where he states that he designed the car's movement and the routes they drove. On the other hand, the car is Kiarostami's favourite location, and he used it in most of his pre-digital work including *Taste of Cherry*. Thus we cannot emphasise it as something new in terms of digital films.

In most of his films, such as *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami acts as an author; he designs everything in connection with reality and tries to manipulate actors and other factors to represent a view of the real world as his own cinematic reality. In *Ten*, he shares his authority as an author-director with the real world and non-actors as a means of releasing them in the close context he has made for them, a car in a street of Tehran, with a plot. As he claims, "Reality [as it] existed was constantly being played before me or out of my sight" (Kiarostami, 2004), and he had a chance to record it and then shape it as a film. Thus, he created a rival for his author-director position, which is reality. He broke parts of that reality and made his film (Kiarostami, 2004).

Most of the time in his other films, because of the equipment and professional filmmaking essentials, he had to involve himself in the details in order to keep the cinematic reality close to 'the truth', which he was trying to approach. For example, he asked the actors in *Taste of Cherry* to look at a specific side of the

camera, and he supervised the lighting to ensure it was realistic. However, in *Ten*, because of the digital equipment, he had a chance to record a level of reality that he could not have achieved with professional filmmaking techniques and equipment.

He claims in *10 on Ten* (2004) that the latter film features non-professional actors with a non-professional director. In other words, he was a director who allowed scenes to flow independently for a while. This does not mean he does not follow any aesthetic rules and orders during filming. Kiarostami's main concern was to avoid interrupting the natural behaviour and real world. Thus he applied his authorship in two stages before and after filming through the design and editing. Whereas, during filming, his was concerned about aesthetics, by the design stage he was conducting the scenes. Although this design began with the very first stage of pre-production, it still existed when filming continued in his absence. He started to apply this design from the actors' consciousness, which helped them to improvise the dialogue based on the story to the camera angle and the filter he used in some windows and also the street he chose for them to drive along. For example, I should mention his work with actors from the very beginning. He states: "I had a good relationship with Mania and her husband; I knew about their lives and could build on that. So I reminded Amin of what he'd thought some time earlier, and told him to say something along those lines. So the idea was mine but the dialogue belongs to the actor" (Andre, 2005, p.22).

Thus, Kiarostami seems to have built his artistic design on the actors' lives and let them present themselves freely through realistic and naturalistic behaviour.



## *Interaction with real events: A Comparison between The Circle and Offside*

*The Circle* (2002), the winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival of 2002, is the story of several individual women who have legal problems. It starts with the story of two female prisoners, Nargess and Arezoo, who escape from prison. The film then continues with another escaped prisoner, Pari, who wants to abort her baby; this strand connects to a mother who wants to abandon her child. The final story concerns a prostitute arrested by the police. These adventures appear separate from each other but, in the end, the characters all encounter one another in a circle-shaped prison.

*Offside* (2006) was the winner of the Silver Bear at The Berlin Film Festival of 2006. *Offside* is the story of teenage girls who go to watch football at a stadium, a prohibited activity for women in Iran. The girls come from different backgrounds and all of them are arrested by the police. However, an emotional and sympathetic relationship develops between the girls and the police officers, and they finally escape.

### *Subject*

The subject of *The Circle* is that of vulnerable women in Iranian society, although Jafar Panahi claims that it is about restriction. He said he had also tried to show this restriction in his other films. He believes this restriction is applied to men as well, but in *The Circle* he shows just a part of this restriction (Akrami, 2000). He does not mention discrimination, although some critics mentioned this term to describe the subject of *The Circle*. Pausing at this point, we can say that the subjects of *The Circle* and *Offside* are the same as both of them are about restriction and both of them present the restriction applied on women in Iranian society. However, there are obviously many general differences between *Offside* and *The Circle* in terms of subject matter. The subject of *Offside* is close to the real life of the Iranian middle class, who are struggling with the government to obtain more entertainment and freedom, whereas *The Circle* takes a more factual look at working-class women.

## *Script*

*The Circle* has a fully written script and, although the first scene is a three-and-a-half-minute shot, the director took six working days to complete it. Every single shot was designed. Concerning the first shot, he used a hand-held documentary method on the one hand while, on the other hand, he claims that he could not anticipate what would happen during the 3.30 minutes of filming in each floor. This shows that he may have tried to adopt things from locations and incidents rather than designing everything beforehand in the script (Akrami, 2000). Although *The Circle's* script does not follow the three-act pattern precisely, it is fully designed, applying the artistic hook and climax to maintain the audience's involvement in the film. Panahi claimed that he summarised the whole film in his first 3:30-minute shot and showed the subject and stories from the birth of a woman and roaming in a circle (Akrami, 2000). This method has been used in Arabic and Persian literature named *Beraat Estehlal*, which means making the audience aware of the subject of the story or speech before going into detail. It is similar to what usually occurs in a speaker's introduction to a presentation. The script tries to retain this concept and portrays it in the lives of four different characters. Among the ways in which the characters interact, these four characters mostly "experience conflict in achieving their dramatic need" (Field, 2003, p.47). The audience can follow any of the characters' stories as a short film, and we perceive an initial hook: all the protagonists are vulnerable and are facing a dilemma, and we anticipate a climax or mini-climax for any of them. However, this structure does not fully resemble the conventional three-act structure that Field (2003) describes, and when the story moves to the mother and her child and the prostitute, it is not like Nargess' story. Instead, it is part of the conclusion of the whole script and shows us the final step in being women, in Panahi's view. Naficy believes: "The dead-end lives of these women, as well as those of an addict mother and prostitute (who smokes on camera), are interwoven with daft realism in to grim and hopeless tapestry" (Naficy, 2012, p.129). He assesses these kinds of narratives as "conservative narratives with weak female characters and a pedantic, forced ending" (Naficy, 2012, p.145). The script, written by one of the best scriptwriters in Iran, Kambuzia Partovi, is very deep and precise. However, Jafar Panahi claimed that he changed it just a few weeks before filming, based on certain

ideas (Akrami, 2000), which shows Panahi's tendency to seek freedom from pre-written scripts. This is where the desire for digital filmmaking arises.

In *Offside*, as Jafar Panahi said, he used a kind of open script that was just fifty per cent written; the remaining material was devised from incidents that occurred at the scene (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012). The major point he is usually asked about in terms of the script was the flexibility of the script in relation to the result of a football match. He replied that he may have changed some important incidents in the stories based on a new result because "The narrative in this movie is embedded in a documentary manner" (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012). He pointed out another aspect of an open script when he talked about certain characters, such as the soldiers. He said: "As we were shooting the film, we realized that there was more room for the soldiers, and we should give them a little more room to project their personalities, their opinions, their views. So, gradually, we made their presence a little more prominent" (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012). Thus, improvisation, one of the aspects of Iranian art referred to by Naficy (2011a), plays a considerable role in *Offside*. In fact, digital camera facilities and low filming costs encourage film-makers to leave scripts open for external incidents, and this retains a documentary approach. Despite the claim of the director, an audience can easily perceive a fully structured script in film. This means that, although the director left some parts of the script to the event (a football match) and the incidents around it, on one hand the basic structure of the script is strong enough to lead the incidents and embed them. On the other hand, as the director claimed, he was lucky enough to encounter pleasing incidents, as he had hoped. For example, had Iran lost the match, the ending of the film would have changed in some aspects and we would not have seen a happy atmosphere. Panahi even believes that, had the first Iranian goal been scored in the first half, changes to parts of the film would have been inevitable (Jenkins, 2006).

The film starts with a hook in the first minutes as the old man searches for his daughter, saying that, if he cannot find her, she will be killed. It then introduces the protagonist (not as a character but as a gender). This means that the female character in the first scenes is representative of her gender. In the second act, we see some climaxes and mini-climaxes and, at the same time, the film tends towards comedy or, as Panahi puts it, bitter comedy. However, the resolution in

the last act satisfies the audience as a happy ending. In fact, while the protagonist is a group of girls, the antagonist is not a soldier or a specific character: it is the law or, as Panahi calls it, restriction. Naficy believes that, unlike some Iranian neorealist films about women “which are serious and portentous, Panahi’s *Offside* features the playful deployment of young females” (Naficy, 2012, p.132) and this may be a turning point for Panahi and this genre.

In conclusion, the fully structured script in *The Circle* is a modern kind of script that had been designed and adapted from pre digital cinema; one cannot find a trace of open script because the cost of 35 mm filming offered less space for chance and incidents during filming. . However, *Offside*’s script tries to take advantage of having digital cameras and filming in real locations as an opportunity to make a film in a documentary style and then making it more realistic and closer to ‘the truth’, as Kiarostami states in *10 on Ten* (2004).

### *Location*

*The Circle* has various locations, and most of them are external and in the streets of Tehran. As Panahi claims, the locations are precisely designed based on the content of the film and even its title (Akrami, 2000). This means that the director has tried to choose circle-shaped buildings and locations with artistic curves for filming. These would include the coach station, the cinema and even the jail at the end of the film. Most of the external locations are crowded and in real places. Filming with 35mm cameras in real, crowded locations is hard and requires much time and effort. Panahi said about the first scene: “we ended up doing thirteen takes in five days, plus one day of rehearsal. So, this single scene takes six days” (Akrami, 2000). He mentions the decision to work in real locations as the cause of these multiple takes. Technically, working in a real location renders the scene vulnerable to any unforeseen incident. On the other hand, because of the cost of the film, the technical crew cannot afford to make mistakes; thus, to reduce the number of errors, the number of rehearsal and preparation days must be increased. Therefore, while one can potentially take a lot of shots in a day, one should spend some time on preparation and rehearsals.

*Offside* has relatively fewer locations than *The Circle*. In fact, more than sixty per cent of the film takes place in just two locations (a minibuss and a temporary

lockup). In this case, we cannot claim that digital filming facilitates the filming process. However, in a few of the film's locations, filming is hard or impossible without a small digital camera, as the director claims in his interview (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012). For example, the entrance to the stadium and the scenes of the football match were used because of the *mise en scene*, not the location itself.

Madanipour's (2012) notion about the role of the journey in Iranian neorealism presents itself in the choice of location. He believes that "the urban space is represented as labyrinth" (Madanipour, 2012, p.132) in *The Circle* and the characters take a journey in it but finally return to the starting point. Thus, the hospital, coach station and bazaar are parts of this labyrinth which helps Panahi to represent the restriction of women in Iran. Whereas, with reference to Madanipour's notion of the journey, we can find no journey like that in Panahi's digital films about restriction. In *Offside*, a huge part of the film takes place in a temporary lock-up although there are two journeys, to and from the stadium (temporary lock-up), which represent urban spaces on unusual occasions, and those locations required digital film-making.

### *Camera (Movement and Angle)*

Camera movement and angle are one of the most important characteristics of these films by Panahi's, especially in case of *The Circle*. He claims that the movement of the camera is related to the story of the women who feature in the film. Therefore, he talked about four methods of photography and we will try to use his proposed divisions to analyse the film (Rist, 2009).

*The Circle* starts with a lengthy shot of more than three minutes. Panahi spoke about using a hand-held camera and a long take to generate the impact of a documentary atmosphere on the audience. I should mention the history of the usage of hand-held cameras in documentaries: "the French New Wave, in the early sixties, was noted for the creation of a new vocabulary of hand-held camera movements, and the lightweight camera made possible the style of cinema-vérité documentary invented during the sixties and still common today" (Monaco, 2009: 109). "Because the technique originated in documentary filming, it can lend an air of authenticity to pseudo-documentaries" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2007, p.196). Moreover, as the hospital staircase has a curved

and helical form, *The Circle* starts with the movement of the camera before the story begins, implying the general message of the film (Akrami, 2000). The camera remains hand-held until the end of the first character's story. As the director avoids cuts and uses long takes in the rest of the first part of the film, the hand-held camera follows the characters, using pans and tilts to connect the characters and locations. For example, another long take of around two minutes (20:58-23:12) and a shot before it (19:35- 20:58) use the moving hand-held camera to keep audience in a documentary atmosphere. This movement is continued until we see a long take of Pari's home (12:21-15:05), when the camera stops moving and in the next shot remains on a tripod. As we discussed before, long takes and avoidance of cuts is one of the methods of realist filmmakers. Most of the shots in this part of the film are at eye level or P.O.V., when characters are walking on steps. In the last case, we have some low-level or high-level shots according to the nature of the locations and the staircase, especially when the director is trying to portray the helical shape of the staircase or other locations.

From minute thirty-nine, the camera is obviously operating from a tripod but we still see moving shots with the usage of pan and tilt. However, the director does not hesitate to use long-take static shots wherever he finds a good frame with a proper *mise-en-scene* , such as a shot in a box office (41:32-44:01) and a changing room in the hospital (53.55-56:33) (Figure 11) . He retains his tendency to avoid cutting and he connects shots with the movement of the camera as well.



Figure 11: Long-take static shot in changing room in the hospital (54:30)

The first use of a tracking shot occurs in the story of the mother (1:07:55-1:11:33), where we see a long take that merges into a tracking shot to a car shot. This shows that long moving takes in this film are not limited to the hand-held camera. As Figgis states, “the function of camera movement is to assist the storytelling” (Figgis, 2007, p.86). Thus, Panahi used camera movement to tell his story more effectively.

In the last part of the film, which portrays a prostitute, a stationary camera is used. However, the last shots are in a minibus and we can see the moving background, as Panahi mentioned in his interview (Akrami, 2000).



Figure 12: Eye-level medium shot of prostitute, avoiding any biased view (1:13:05)

As most of the shots in all sections of the film are at eye level, it is felt that the director was avoiding any biased view of the women in the film, even the prostitute (Figure 12). Moreover, most of the shots that he used are medium shots and long shots, and he largely avoids close-ups (Figure 13). Perhaps his main purpose in the film was not to examine the personalities of the characters but rather to portray their social lives. As Naficy states, long takes and the “predominance of medium and long shots” (Naficy, 2011b, p.226) are characteristics of neorealism which show the importance of subject rather than characters in this kind of cinema.





Figure 13: Predominance of long shots and medium shots in the film; Nargess and her friend are arguing in a long shot (6:15)

Jafar Panahi claims that the movement of the camera is related to characters in the film; as we stated earlier, we see four main characters in the film and we then recognise four different methods of photography used to portray them. He states that the first character, Nargess, is moving a lot and the camera is simply chasing her. We can see movement in the second and third characters as well, with the camera recording their activities moving with them. However, the last one, a prostitute who has been arrested, does not move; therefore, stationary shots present her character. These movements reflect the characters. Nargess is a young girl who lives in a dream-world; she is moving and discovering the world and this is portrayed by shaky camera shots. Pari is escaping from her role as a mother whereas the mother is simply roaming because she has lost her child and has nothing from which to run or escape; thus, a tracking shot shows her depression and stability at the same time. Finally, the prostitute who accepts her destiny is portrayed by fix shots (Rist, 2009). However, we cannot claim that all these camera movements are the best choice and completely matched to each character because other aspects should be considered in this regard as well. Master cinematographer Gordon Willis states that “It is not one thing to do in a visual point of view that makes everything work”, and shot structure, lighting and other aspects should also be considered in this regard (Glassman et al., 1992).

Introducing a documentary form of drama, *Offside* starts with shaky hand-held camera shots and a wide lens. These shaky shots continue until 20:56 minutes when a new location, a temporary lock-up, is introduced. Then camera starts moving on a tripod, and a stationary shot also begins. While the story continues in this location, the camera is on a tripod; however, when we leave this location in minute 33:13, shaky shots from a hand-held camera resume. Then, from minute 43:23, when the story returns to the temporary lock-up, the filmmaker uses tripod and stationary shots again and these shots continue until minute 1:06:41 when the minibus leaves the stadium. Filming in a vehicle, such as a minibus full of characters, requires flexibility in the method of filming, from a hand-held camera to a stationary one in some shots. However, when the story merges with the documentary shots of Iran's victory ceremony, which takes place on the streets of Tehran, a moving hand-held camera was used as a unique way of tackling this situation. I should mention several points that Figgis (2007) mentioned about changes in camera movement and its relation with location and character, which we can also find in *Offside*. In his view, when we imprison characters in tight locations the approach to filming them is different. Otherwise, he states, "the camera is handheld so that I can follow them and create a dynamic between them, myself, and the camera, which will empower them in some way" (Figgis, 2007, p.88). On the other hand, the use of hand-held cameras plays a big role in blurring the line between documentary and fiction. In deeper analysis, we can say that this usage of hand-held cameras in this kind of digital film, which tries to fuse a documentary in the background with a work of fiction in the foreground, acts as a semantic code in Barthes' (1964) semiotic analysis (Figures 14 and 15). In other words, the shaky hand-held camera signifies a kind of documentary authenticity but it also works as a method of telling a story.



Figure 14: Fusing documentary with fiction in the stadium by using a hand-held camera and deep focus of wide lens. (43:16)



Figure 15: Fusing documentary with fiction in a street of Tehran by using deep focus and hand-held camera.

We can analyse camera movement from several points of view in this film. As the film has been imbued with a documentary atmosphere, we can divide it into two parts. The first part comprises the shots that use real events as background or atmosphere of the film, while the second part is the shots that were separate from the real events and only involve the actors. In the first part, which starts

from minute 09:07 until 16:58, the use of a small hand-held digital camera is inevitable and, as a result, we see shaky shots that follow the main character or show people as if in a documentary. As the event occurred in a single day and recreating this kind of crowded atmosphere is very hard, if not impossible, these kinds of shots are best for capturing a drama in which actors are mixed with real people in a real atmosphere. However, we see these kinds of shots in other locations such as toilets. The film-maker was probably trying to assemble an order for using these shots in the film, as I theoretically explain above. He then uses a stationary camera only for the lock-up and uses shaky and moving shots for other parts of the film, which are partially mixed with scenes of real events, such as what happens in the toilets when the girl runs away to the stadium, and when the camera follows the soldier and shows more than a hundred thousand football fans. In this case, we see the logic of using a hand-held camera instead of a stationary one or even a tracking shot. In fact, using a hand-held camera and a shaky picture helps the film-maker to create a documentary atmosphere in a film, and using this method in the whole film does not need any justification or reason. Thus, using stationary shots in part of the film has its aesthetic reason or implies the meaning of the lock-up, which is a place where characters cannot move easily and there is no freedom. Using a wide lens in the documentary part of the film is quite usual for providing a proper depth of field showing the people and the background; as we discussed, this is a realistic method. Thanks to small digital video cameras, the film-maker was able to use depth of focus in both parts of the film to make it more dynamic and realistic as well. As Bazin states, “depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic” (Bazin, 1967, p.35). On the other hand, as Robert Wise states, having depth of focus gives more dynamic to a film as we can follow a character in the background while another character acts in foreground (Glassman et al., 1992), and we can see the advantage of this particularly in the temporary lock-up, where we can follow the acts and reactions of all the actors in one shot (Figure 16). Most of the shots are at eye level in order to avoid judging the characters on the one hand and placing all of them at the same level of pressure or freedom, be they girls or soldiers, on the other.



Figure 16: Creating a dynamic in the lock-up by using depth of focus (50:37)

### *Lighting*

Panahi used low-key lighting in his films and, although the filming takes place in summertime (to judge from people's clothing), it seems cold and rather dark. Most of the shots are in shadow and we rarely see a character in late afternoon sunshine, such as the bus station scene (22:00-22:20). The lighting is very successful in suggesting the cold and depressing atmosphere of restriction, whereas the cold, white lighting in the hospital is quite natural and realistic as most hospitals use white florescent lights. The cold, blue atmosphere is strikingly apparent in the film. In this case we can consider the lighting "emotional (to establish or emphasize a mood)" (Zettl, 2008, p.50) although it might be completely organic in places such as hospitals in Iran. Moreover, the highly contrasting lighting on the face of the mother from 1:06 to 1:12 is natural in the streets of Tehran, although this may be suggestive of the character's personality or the disintegration of her situation (Figure 17). In fact, as far as we are concerned in this chapter, the lighting in *The Circle* is professionally designed. This is 'chiaroscuro lighting' that "emphasizes contrasting light and shadow areas and has fast falloff" (Zettl, 2008, p.50). As around two thirds of the scenes take place at night, the lighting process and equipment present a major challenge to the filmmaker, and this surely affects every aspect of the



film, from the actors to the director, who is trying to present a realistic and believable atmosphere.



Figure 17: High contrast on the mother's face which is organic and looks natural (1:07:46)

In contrast, the lighting in *Offside* was dictated by the film's documentary atmosphere, and the film-maker must therefore have dealt with its limitations. Thus, we find a kind of flat lighting in some scenes. "Flat lighting has slow falloff, and the shadows are highly transparent or simply non-existent" (Zettl, 2008, p.50). In the scenes that use the real event as their context, in order to deal with the complex situation of filming without raising people's awareness or influencing their behaviour, no lighting equipment was used. Most of these scenes take place in sunshine and give the film a warm atmosphere. As the lock-up was in a part of the stadium controlled by the filming project, they had the option of using lighting devices; however, considering the situation of the film and the time of the football match, we cannot find any extra lighting in this part. All the scenes are in shadows with occasional background sunshine. Thus, we find a kind of flat lighting there (Figure 18). This situation helps the film-maker to maintain the continuity of the lighting for longer. The sensitivity of the digital camera must have made it easier to light the toilets and minibus scenes, and the lighting equipment is smaller than that required for the 35 mm film in *The Circle*. In the minibus shots in particular, when we compare the natural lighting of the external background and the lighting of the minibus, we can

clearly appreciate the digital camera's capacity and sensitivity in recording natural light and small amounts of light at night.

In conclusion, I can claim that although the lighting of *Offside* is less professional and adapted to the time and place of the event, it is entirely suitable to the director's aim of producing a documentary-based drama. Using natural light in most of the scenes blends the two parts of the film together and makes it more believable and documentary-like.



Figure 18: Using flat natural daylight in the lock-up (27:48)

### *Acting*

As Panahi claimed, apart from Pari and the mother, all the characters in *The Circle* were portrayed by non-professionals (Akrami, 2000). In fact, the professional casting of these two parts is an exception in Panahi's entire oeuvre, as he prefers to choose non-actors rather than professional actors. Naficy (2011b) also mentions the usage of the 'non-professional cast' in Iranian neorealism. However, Panahi stated that in *The Circle* he did not insist on either professionals or non-professionals. His main concern was the physical adaptation of the actors to the characters, and he trusted in his ability to guide even the non-actors in their roles (Akrami, 2000). However, by analysing and comparing the roles of the actors, I believe we can find more points concerning this factor.

Nargess, the first main character, is a non-actor. Panahi chose her based on her physical body and face, which seems vulnerable (Akrami, 2000). Her character is passive and she prefers to smile, ignore and run away rather than fight. Her face reacts to everything around her and she appears very animated and emotional (Figure 19). Although she does not say much compared to the other characters, her intonation and body language appears naturalistic and realistic, and she does not exaggerate her reactions, especially in the scene where she runs away at minute 06:15. In contrast, Arezoo, Nargess' friend, is an aggressive girl with masculine behaviour, although she, too, seems believable. She is characterised by her rapid speech, like a person in rush.

The second main character, Pari, is played by a professional actress. As a reference point, her acting in the hospital changing rooms (53:55 -56:30) has all the elements of classic and realistic acting, including intonation, body language and facial expression. Although the director rarely uses close-ups of characters, the actress uses all her skills to express her emotion and role to the audience. Monir and Elham, the leading characters in this part of the film, are portrayed as different kinds of personalities, both warm and cold. Although Monir seems more impressive, Elham, through her representation as a shy and fearful person (with her cold face), has a more important role in the story.

The mother is the other professional actor in the film. She plays a woman who has broken down, and everything in her face and intonation show this. The last character is merely symbolic, with no significant aspects in her portrayal. Her short role is mostly communicated by her facial expressions when she looks at the mother or at the bride and finally when she is smoking in the minibus.





Figure 19: Nargess represents a vulnerable girl in Iranian society (5:48)

All the performers in *Offside* are non-professionals, as Panahi claimed (Maruf, 2006). The old man is the first to appear and the young boy is the last, while a number of characters appear and perform in *Offside* between these two. Panahi, in his bitter comedy, gives the actors the freedom to act and react to the documentary-like atmosphere and one another. For example, in the scene at the stadium entrance, some actions are based on incidents that occur in the scene. For example, Panahi explains that the incident occurring at minute 12:18 (when the security guard recognises the girl and attempts to catch her) was accidental and the actress was shocked by it, but she managed to deal with this new situation thanks to the director's guidance (Panahi and Wisniewski 2012). In this case, like some other kinds of digital film-making "the camera is not attempting to frame the action but only to cover it" (Ganz and Khatib, 2005, p.26).

We can categorise the actors in *Offside* based on their gender: Arrested girls and soldiers. Panahi said he had not considered significant roles for the soldiers; however, as the situation developed, they showed that they had the potential for more acting in the film (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012).

I intend to compare these girls with Nargess and Arezoo in *The Circle* in order to assess the extent to which the acting differs. First, we should analyse the girls' characters in a spectrum from the aggressive, masculine behaviour of the

girl with the '1864 hat' to the naughty girl in military dress and, finally, to the two shy girls in blue shirts. We can place two other girls, the footballer and the girl in a veil, in the middle. The facial expressions and body language of the first two girls, especially the first one, demonstrate a kind of character that one rarely finds in society, whereas, in the context of other characters, they seem believable and realistic. In comparison, Arezoo's acting in *The Circle* seems more believable and natural. I think that, in *Offside*, because the characters and the script tend towards comedy, the filmmaker needed to add some exaggerated elements in order to achieve his goal.

However, there is another hypothesis that more closely matches Panahi's works and views: the kinds of characters portrayed in this case are strange because they are rare, and society always hides them and does not let them display themselves; thus, *Offside* demonstrates these characters for the first time. Based on this idea, we can assess the acting of these two girls as realistic and naturalistic. The most significant parts of their acting are the times when they switch to the female parts of their characters; for example, at minute 45:50 the girl with '1896 hat' talks to the soldier and advises him, or at minute 1:06:52 the girl in the military dress breaks down and cries. In fact, this kind of acting and switching between different aspects of a character distinguishes the acting of these actresses and makes them notable in comparison to Arezoo in *The Circle*. However, the shy girls in blue shirts did not have enough space to demonstrate their characters, unlike Nargess in *The Circle*. Yet the first girl (in the film) has a more significant role compared to the other two. Although her facial expressions and intonation are not as impressive as Nargess, her acting, especially in the real scenes, is natural and she demonstrates a vulnerable girl in an unfair context of the masculine world. Of course, her role fades when she is placed in the lock-up with the more animated girls. The girl in the chequered shirt and the girl in the veil use body language and intonation to portray female football fans. Apart from one of the girls in blue shirts (the one who lost her uncle), the other girls have sufficient space to demonstrate their characters through their acting, even the first girl in the story. Yet we cannot consider any of these girls as having leading roles in the film.

In fact, each of the characters stands for a type of girl, and the acting of each actress demonstrates that type naturally. However, the reactions of these

different non-professional actors to one another distinguish *Offside* from *The Circle* (Figure 20).

In the case of the male actors, the soldiers and a teenage boy, we find a different kind of acting that makes them appear more natural, especially the soldiers. Two main characters, Mashhadi and the corporal, look very natural because of their intonation, dialects and facial expressions. They lead the other side of the story actively and gain the audience's sympathy. Panahi claims that he had not considered significant roles for them; however, during the filming, he felt that they were capable of more acting in the film (Panahi and Wisniewski 2012). Thus we see the importance of improvising, which is one of the elements of some Iranian art, as Naficy claims (2011a), in this digital film. As I claimed, in the case of *Taste of Cherry*, the use of rural dialects can hide some awkward acting in the case of non-actors. We can see this in the acting of the corporal, who speaks in a Turkish dialect that is full of grammatical mistakes and funny. Regardless of which dialect the film-maker used, the performers' intonation and body language are naturalistic and realistic, as are their facial expressions. The teenage boy represents a working-class teen. His face and intonation is naturalistic, and his performance as an active and naughty boy is part of the spectrum of characters played by male actors in the film. When the end of the male and female spectra react to each other, from minute 1:07:30, we witness some of the best acting in the film.

At this stage, we should distinguish between what we consider as the acting of individuals and the acting discourse in film. In other words, when we talk about individual non-actors in a film, such as Arezoo and Nargess in *The Circle*, and compare them with the blue-shirted girls and the girl in military dress in *Offside*, the level of comparison is different from talking about 10 non-actors acting with one another in the lock-up for more than 50 minutes. It is this aspect that distinguishes digital film-making from traditional film-making. At this level of acting, a non-professional actor not only reacts to the atmosphere of the film but also makes this atmosphere part of the acting discourse. Therefore, we should consider the lock-up and minibus scenes in *Offside* as unique, and we cannot compare them with *The Circle*. In these situations, an atmosphere is generated for a non-actor to dive into his/her role and create a new form of cinematic reality that is closer to 'the truth'. I can claim that, without digital filming, this

level is very hard to achieve, since we know that non-professional actors usually require several takes.



Figure 20: We can recognise a spectrum in the actresses' characters from aggressive to shy and calm, all of which interact with one another; minibus scene (1:15:31)

### *Directing*

In *The Circle*, Panahi acted as an director who designed, directed and controled different aspects of filming. The idea of *The Circle* draws from the script to the circle-shaped locations and from the actors and characters to the camera movement, with Panahi leading everything towards his particular view of reality. However, in *Offside*, the role of the director is different because a real event (a football match) restricted the film to certain locations and even a particular kind of cinematography and *mise-en-scene*. As Panahi claimed, he was forced to use digital film-making, firstly because he is banned from professional film-making by the government and, secondly, because the football match situation necessitated it (Firoozan, 2008). Although the use of digital filming in that project was unavoidable, this type of film-making entailed certain consequences and conferred on him certain gifts that enabled him to communicate his view. In other words, Panahi did not necessarily embrace digital filming but tried to deal with it as an alternative means. For example, he asked one of the actresses to walk in a certain part of the stadium and, when an obstacle suddenly appeared and a guard chased her, he asked her to follow the incident and run away

(Panahi and Wisniewski, 2012). This shows that he still has a desire to control actors and events and to challenge them,. This method is different from what we saw in *Ten*, as *The Circle* is different from Kiarostami's work. In fact, in *Offside* the director tries to take advantage of filming within a real event while simultaneously adding his ideas and directing them toward his goal. In the case of *Offside*, reality does not exist without the director's order and direction, like *The Circle*.

As Panahi claimed, *Offside* was filmed in 38 days (Firoozan, 2008), which is not a particularly short time for a digital film. This shows that Panahi's approach to digital cinema is different from others. He uses digital equipment to free his projects from restriction. However, he appreciates the opportunity offered by digital film-making to approach reality as it is. In the scene where the blue-shirted girl runs away from the plainclothes police officers, he takes advantage of the digital camera's ability to be omnipresent. Furthermore, having chosen ten non-professional actors in a closed location, he was confident that the digital camera would allow him to take many shots in order to produce the realistic acting that he desired. Although Panahi, as the director, was less involved here in *mise-en-scene*, acting and other aspects of film-making than in *The Circle*, his main job as the writer and director of a digital film was to interact with the real world and, in this case, with the football match and the incidents around it. In other words, the director in *Offside* had live interaction with reality and guided the film towards his goal (to demonstrate restriction). As he claimed, he had to decide on the next shot when his actress came face to face with the police by accident and, had Iran been defeated in the football match, he would have taken other shots for use in the film (Jenkins, 2006). Thus we see a kind of improvisation in directing. These are the methods that an author-director can employ in digital film-making when he is in the middle of the real world, dealing with it and reacting to it. In other words, it is like producing a play in the real world with the director as one of the players. Of course, we can see a kind of improvisation in *The Mirror* (1997), among Panahi's pre-digital films, but the level of this improvisation is different from what happens in *Offside*. The cost of 35 mm filming prevents the director from utilising real improvisation with events and the real world; the director can only improvise with an actor's reaction in a scene or a few shots and then pretend to improvise in other scenes.

## *Digital high-resolution cameras and old methods: A Comparison between Half Moon and No One Knows about Persian Cats*

*Half Moon* (2006) won the Golden Shell at the San Sebastian International Film Festival. It is about an old Iranian Kurdish musician, Mamo, who wants to stage a concert in Iraq. He gathers all his sons and a driver named Kako and begins his journey; he even asks a female singer called Hesho to join them but this causes problems for them. The police arrest the singer and they are banned from going to Iraq. However, Mamo insists on pursuing his ambition and tries other ways. A Kurdish girl, Papoola, helps them through the mountains but Mamo dies. They put him in his coffin at the concert according to his will.

*No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009) won the special jury prize in the Uncertain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival 2009. The story is about a couple, Ashkan and Negar, who make underground music in Iran and want to go to London for a concert; however, they have passport problems. Nader, a black market DVD trader, helps them to find a solution and they meet other underground musicians and bands and ask them to accompany them. Ultimately, all their plans fail; Ashkan is killed and Negar commits suicide.

### *Subject*

Ghobadi claims that the subject of *Half Moon* is the crossing of borders, like his previous films (Guillén, 2006). However, in another interview, he mentions women singing and musicians as the main subject of this movie (Quilty, 2007). In fact, the first explanation connects *Half Moon* to his previous works, and forbidden music connects this film to his next one, *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. Ghobadi states that his favourite subject is music in the context of Kurdish problems and the crossing of borders. As a result, this film is more political than his other films because the characters are struggling with their nationalities as well as their cultures in their dealings with the political authorities. *No One Knows about Persian Cats* should be considered a less

political movie than *Half Moon*. The subject of *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is underground music in Iran. Ghobadi shows the problem of underground music with society as well as with government. On one hand, he claims that he “wanted to show this city [Tehran] with its potential and energy” (Wojczuk, 2010), and on the other hand, in another interview, he claims that his filmmaking is political (Macaulay, 2010). This shows that he approached underground music as a political subject rather than an artistic one. Although both of these subjects could be categorised as political subjects, talking about underground music with real characters in Tehran requires a different kind of film-making. The context of the film is a matter for consideration when deciding whether to use digital film-making as a method.

### *Script*

Ghobadi claims that he did not write a full script for *Half Moon*; in fact, the film, its scenes and its bunch of non-professional actors imply a kind of open script. Although the film appears to be a poetic movie, Ghobadi claims, “All you see in the movie is the real life of the people. ... If you go to Kurdistan, you see this poetry in the everyday life of the people.” (Guillén, 2006) As he is working in the context of Iranian neorealism, he tries to prove that his film is based on reality rather than poetic attitudes to Kurdish people and their music. The script has two aspects: realistic and poetic. It seems that the structure of his script is based on a poetic idea but he uses the factors of realism, non-professional actors and an open script to expand it into reality. In an interview in 2010, he claims that, “most of the time, I don’t even have a script. I start filmmaking with just two or three written pages. I go to the location and prepare my dialogue about half an hour before I start to film, and I usually complete the script after I’m done directing. I do this in order to be as natural and close to reality as possible” (Macaulay, 2010). However, one senses that *Half Moon* has more than three pages of script because of his poetic theme and the presence of some professional actors who usually work with a script. Apart from some mini-crises relating to the police’s capture of the singer (minutes forty-four and fifty-four), *Half Moon* lacks the elements of a classical script. Mamo has most of the characteristics required in an impressive protagonist. The story mainly seems to concern this character and his struggle against death, while the female singer simply provides crises in the story, rendering it closer to a classical one.

However, Ghobadi also tries to portray Kurdish music and musicians. He uses Mamo as a metaphor for Kurdish music and its future, and this approach makes the film poetic (refer to Ruiz's (2007) idea about using the metaphor in art). In addition, Sheibani's notion about poetic film can be recognised in Mamo's story as "his journey resembles the stages a Sufi should pass through in his or her spiritual growth" (Sheibani, 2011, p.50). In fact, she believes that a poetical film "represents a universal story of human beings and how they challenge and question concepts such as life and death" (Sheibani, 2011, p.42).

Concerning *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, Ghobadi claims, "When we started shooting, we had about 20 or 30 pages of a script. But we kept getting ideas from the kids and the bands that we met" (Macaulay 2010). He insists on capturing reality in film and keeping the script open to include ideas and incidents from real life. He says, "I go to live with my characters...I want them to use their own lives. I take from them, and then I give back to them" (Macaulay 2010). He believes that he merely gives the reality an ending and a cinematic form. Field believes that "The ending comes out of the beginning. Someone, or something, initiates an action, and how that action is resolved becomes the storyline of the film" (Field, 2003, p.127). Thus, the storyline was clear and it came from reality. Field called this kind of screenwriting European: "The European screenwriter takes an idea and dramatizes it" while the American screenwriter "takes an idea and builds it into a story to dramatize it" (Field, 2003, p.127). In fact, Ghobadi is talking about the first and the last scenes of the film (Ashkan in the hospital). Clearly, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* can be divided into two different parts in terms of the script. The first is the dramatic part, which forms the main structure of the film and describes the characters' storylines, while the second is the video clips (14:02-15:34 , 28:00-29:28,34:50-36:39, 41:12-42:29, 50:10-51:34,62:24-65:00, 72:04-74:23, 78:00-80:54, 85:24-86:58). There are nine music videos in the film, most of them recorded live in Tehran. Five other parts of the film (54:55-55:28,57:40-59:00, 68:55-70:03, 86:30-89:29 , 95:37-97:27) are mixed with music, not only as the music of the film but also as a kind of music video that is related to the main story. In contrast, the first kind of music videos are not completely separate from the film, which means that the main script (20 pages) is mixed and affected by two factors: first, the lives of the real characters and the atmosphere of



Tehran and, second, the music that is chosen (for editing in post-production). About the first part, Ghobadi claims, “I didn’t change any locations and I didn’t change any people. Everything was real. Ninety-five percent of the time, I was truthful to reality. The other 5% is just humour that I added because I didn’t want the film to be all about suffering” (Singer, 2010). Of course, the role of improvisation in this part of the script is important because it is not only an important element of Iranian art but is also, as Naficy (2011a) mentions, part of Iranian music, which is called *Bedahe Navazi*.

However, in regard to the music videos, we cannot accept that claim because of the nature of this kind of film, which is based on music and lyrics. In fact, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* has a very complex script, taking advantage of some elements of classical scripts, such as the hook in the first scene and various crises up until the end. However, we do not see other factors regarding characters and storyline. Ghobadi simply tries to portray the reality of life for underground musicians in Iran, mixing it with other aspects of life in Tehran; consequently, he is unable to follow a good storyline or even devise good dialogues between the characters. Naficy called this film an underground movie because he believes that “underground films are not just films made using the underground production mode but are also films made about such underground formation and practice” (Naficy, 2012:68). He believes that Ghobadi mixed fictional and non-fictional elements to expose the burgeoning underground music scene of the young” (Naficy, 2012, p.68). Referring to Munt’s (2006) idea of an open script in digital film and considering the fact that *Half Moon* also has an open script, I should mention Ghobadi’s wish to make *Half Moon* in digital because of the better access to the audience he had achieved in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (Ghobadi, 2014).

In conclusion, this script requires digital film-making for several reasons. First, the form of the script, which is open and based on improvisation and incidents, requires a digital camera, which has its own flexibility; it does not disturb the mood of the characters and the natural atmosphere and it can achieve long takes that can be used in certain parts of the film. Second, the digital camera gives the group more security in the context of political themes and issues in the script.

### *Locations*

Most of the locations in *Half Moon* are in rural areas, and the film is full of landscapes and picturesque mountains. Even most of the interior locations, such as a café, an instrument-making studio, and a Sufi monastery, are very large, perfect locations and subjects for a 35 mm camera and its view. On the other hand, working with a 35 mm camera or big camera in these locations is easier than in small locations and crowded urban areas. Quiet, large locations give Ghobadi the opportunity to capture his cinematic poetry without being disturbed by the authorities or unforeseen circumstances. In contrast, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* requires a different kind of film-making. Ghobadi wanted to use real locations and, as a consequence, we see small rooms and houses as well as tight corridors in the dramatic parts of the film. Thus, a small portable camera is very suitable for filming in these kinds of locations. In particular, a digital camera can offer a wide range of viewing angles in small locations that a 35mm camera cannot. However, in music videos, locations and shots are suitable for different kinds of cameras, and we will explain this further in a related section. Nonetheless, using a small digital camera is the best method of filming in the crowded city of Tehran, even for music videos.

Referring to Madanipour's notion about the journey in Iranian neorealism, he considers *Half Moon* "a journey from one country to another" (Madanipour, 2012, p135), whereas at the same time we find a journey in a rural area in *Half Moon* in contrast to a journey in an urban area in Ghobadi's digital film. He believes that showing a journey in a rural location helps a film-maker to represent the profound part of the human soul without playing with the audience's emotions, whereas urban locations, be they in streets or in houses and apartments, provide a condition for Iranian neorealist film-makers to analyse human social relations.

### *Camera (movement and angle)*

Ghobadi used a hand-held camera in most of the scenes in *Half Moon*. As he claims, his film is realistic and based on reality, and this method of film-making heightens this feeling for the audience. Actually, Ghobadi wanted to present a poetic cinema as realistic cinema. However, we barely notice any shaking in the frame in some scenes. On the other hand, the film, its subject and genre are not really suitable for a hand-held camera, and it is particularly difficult to distinguish

between fixed shots or shaky ones in long shots. Conveying a poetic and spiritual subject needs some kind of stability in the frames and a stationary camera which allows the spectator to concentrate and have a precise view within the frame to extract the meaning, while the dynamic offered by hand-held cameras is suitable for presenting a realistic atmosphere like everyday life, as we discussed previously. As Sheibani states, poetical senses in Iranian films “do not explore concrete reality in the outside world” (Sheibani, 2011, p.42). Of course, by using fixed frames and playing with time and slow-motion shots or “simply by modifying the parameters of space and time” (Ruiz, 1995, p.90), Ghobadi tries to tackle this problem. Ghobadi uses some fixed frames (02:45-02:49, 03:14-03:15) or reduces the shaking and makes them look like stationary camera footage. Ghobadi uses a slow-motion technique in some scenes to illustrate spiritual subjects (Figure 21). We can see this technique in the Sufi monastery (minute thirty-one), the funeral of Kak Khalil (minute eighty-one) and the death of Mamo (minute one hundred and two).



Figure 21: Representing poetical meaning in the Sufi monastery by using slow motion (30:50)

In *Half Moon*, camera angles and the frame size resemble classic traditional filmmaking. Ghobadi uses long shots to illustrate the atmosphere of Kurdistan and close shots to portray emotion and ideas. He avoids using any unusual angles and artistic *découpage* that need any special equipment or different kinds of film-making and cameras. However, according to Naficy's (2011b) notion about neorealism, the abundance of medium and long shots shows his tendency to Iranian neorealism (Figure 22).



Figure 22: Tendency to Iranian neorealism; Mamo and his disciples in medium four-shot (23:15)

Ghobadi used a hand-held camera in *No One Knows About Persian Cats* for both the dramatic parts and the music videos. Tooraj Aslani, the cinematographer of the film, said in his interview with the author that they used a SI2k (Silicon Image 2K) digital camera for filming. He claims he suggested this camera based on Ghobadi's idea for the film story. Ghobadi, in his interview with the author, also emphasised that he had not realised the power of the digital camera and wished to make *Half Moon* with this camera as well (Ghobadi, 2014). This was the first movie in Iran to be made by SI2K. Aslani said that, after talking with Ghobadi, he realised that "using 35mm as well as digital with low quality is not sufficient for this purpose" (Aslani, 2012). Achieving good quality with a small hand-held camera was a real challenge at the time the film was made. However, Ghobadi insisted on a hand-held camera due to the realistic and documentary feeling it gives the audience, especially as he wanted to use real characters and non-professional actors.

Aslani separated the body of the camera from the optical part and connected them with a long cable in order to film in small, real locations (Aslani, 2012). With the small optical part of SI2K, he was able to follow the actors in tight corridors and find good angles in small rooms. At the same time, he could use cinematic lenses and achieve 2K resolution for the footage. Master cinematographer John A. Alonzo believes new equipment empowers the cameraman and reduces the risk associated with being innovative. "You can put the camera somewhere that no one has put it before" (Glassman et al., 1992).

Aslani “used six cinematic lenses for music videos and took the whole story in the city [dramatic part] and city atmosphere with one lens, 9.5mm super 16” (Aslani 2012). Figgis believes that, “if you’ve got a very wide lens, your camera movement is going to be far more fluid and steady than if you’re on a telephoto lens. Just the nature of the wide angle means that it creates fluidity in its movement” (Figure 23). In fact, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* is the first film in Iran to be shot with the new generation of digital cameras, with the capability of using cinematic lenses and achieving good quality.

Ghobadi could use real places and follow characters in the city, on motorbikes and even in narrow alleys in the south of Tehran by using a small hand-held camera. This allowed the audience to achieve a natural feeling that they were in such places. This is the sense of documentary provided by hand-held cameras discussed previously. Moreover, he was able to finish the filming in 17 days (Biglari, 2009). Aslani (2012) believes that many films made in Tehran have used certain methods of filming (for filming in a vehicle or car, they placed the car on a cinematic trailer and filmed it on Niayesh highway); as a result, most of them look unnatural and similar. However, digital hand held cameras enable filmmakers to take new, realistic shots of different parts of Tehran on cars and motorcycles, thus producing a realistic portrayal of Tehran for the audience.



Figure 23: Fluidity in movement offered by wide lens; flowing characters in narrow corridor (17:55)

Ghobadi used various angles for the music videos based on the types of music and their meanings. He also used some out-of-focus shots (28:04-28:17) and a fast-motion technique which refers to his tendency to poetic cinema (minute

thirty-six and minute fifty), as well as some low-angle and high-angle shots and strange angles relating to the underground music played in these scenes, particularly for rock and metal music. He also used wide shots and typical classic shots for semi-traditional music (72:06-74:12).

However, most of the angles used in the dramatic parts represent the point of view of a character or third person, and the lens does not change, as Aslani explains. In this case, the audience can easily get involved in the film. I should emphasise the depth of focus in these parts of the film as a realistic factor. Bazin believes that "shooting in depth is not just a more economical, a simpler, and at the same time a more subtle way of getting the most out of a scene. In addition to affecting the structure of film language, it also affects the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence it influences the interpretation of the spectacle" (Bazin, 1967, p.35). Everything looks natural and realistic in the dramatic part of the film, just like standing in a street and watching people and events. Of course, we notice some unusual and strange angles, such as in the scene where Nader, Negar and Babak talk to one another in the studio (06:30-07:42) or where Negar is drawing in her home (25:51- 26:00), although we hear some kind of rock music in the background. Ghobadi tried to maintain a kind of movement in the film by using camera movement and moving shots and following actors in narrow corridors and on motorcycles and cars. In particular, the SI2K helped him to follow actors even in real, narrow corridors in the south of Tehran (17:48-18:32). He also used some stationary shots for aesthetic reasons (15:35-15:45, 60:44-61:03, 65:41-66:31). Using a strange shot (from a slot in the door) in the court scene is one of the impressive point-of-view shots that he uses to make the story more believable and realistic (46:09- 49:39). Also, as William A. Fraker believes, "this kind of shot, which hides part of the characters and a scene, involves the audience in the scene and increases their sense of curiosity (Glassman et al., 1992) (Figure 24).



Figure 24: Involving audience by hiding part of the frame; Nader in court (49:15)

In fact, in both films Ghobadi tries to mix some music scenes and poetical elements with the real world but the digital equipment makes the digital film more natural and plausible to some extent.

### *Lighting*

Most of the scenes in *Half Moon* are external and take place in daylight. Thus, Ghobadi uses natural light as the main source for his chiaroscuro lighting in most of the scenes and, as a result, the film looks more natural. By using natural daylight in winter (cloudy with sunny intervals), Ghobadi presents a cold atmosphere, which is congruous with a film about death and more appropriate for some poetic scenes such as the death of Mamo or the scene of the exiled women in the village and the Sufi monastery (Figure 25). The architecture of some internal locations (music instrument studio with a lot of colourful windows, a bus and a cafe) helps to light the interior scenes with natural light. In the film's few night scenes, the usage of fire as a main source of light in some of these scenes (61:29- 65:38) suggests a certain lighting at night. This may be a kind of 'simulated realism' because "we see effects that appear to be quite natural - yet are quite artificially created" (Millerson, 1991, p.242).





Figure 25: Cold natural light helps to represent fear and death on Mamo's face (45:20)

"In terms of light design, my light source is in the frame but no one recognises it" (Aslani, 2012), Aslani claims about the lighting in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. He explains this claim by pointing out that the characters of the film and the underground music are the subjects of the film. When the audience sees the underground studio and a musician who has used egg boxes to improve his studio's acoustics, they believe that the lights in the frame represent this musician's taste in lighting his studio. In fact, Aslani used real sources of light and made them stronger by using halogen lights and other kinds of lighting thanks to the digital camera, which does not need a lot of lighting equipment (Aslani, 2012) (Figure 26). In this case, Ghobadi could give a realistic portrayal of the life of an underground musician by using lighting and a high-sensitivity digital camera. Aslani believes, as in realistic cinema, that what we can see with our eyes is marked as real. As a consequence of this idea, "in realistic cinema I should avoid artificial light and I should connect with architecture for lighting" (Aslani, 2012). Thus, the digital camera allows him to remain loyal to the natural lighting and ordinary lights, particularly when he tries to present a realistic portrayal of underground art and music. Regarding this method of organic lighting in digital film-making, Figgis believes that "instead of experiencing the world to be created for film, it's now become much more a case of how you can fit into a world that already exists" (Figgis, 2007, p.75). The completely dark scene in Nader's place (70:10-71:03) and the use of a candle as a source of light at the end of the scene is one of the special lighting experiences in this



film. However, the lighting in the party scene seems awkward and unrealistic because of a kind of flashlight that follows the characters in the party (91:46-92:39).



Figure 26: Usage of real source of light in location filming; Ashkan and Negar in underground studio (13:39)

### *Acting*

Many non-actors, a few amateurs, one professional star and two Iranian superstars appear in *Half Moon*. However, Ghobadi chose non-professionals to play his main characters, Mamo and Kako. Mamo, an old musician, and Kako, a naïve, middle-aged driver, represent two different classes of Iranian Kurdish people. Thus, in the case of the main character he is more loyal to the heritage of neorealism. Although the story is about Mamo and his ambition to stage a concert for Kurdish people, Kako represents the Kurdish people and appears in most of the scenes, even more than Mamo, and the bitter comedy of the film emanates from his character. Kako can express his emotions via his facial expressions and intonation. His body language clearly expresses his character as an emotional, naive person. Kako presents his character in the first ten minutes of the film as we see different parts of his life as an entertainer controlling a rooster fight race, a friend, father, driver and a husband; he acts like an unsophisticated person who expresses his emotion in impressive and realistic ways, like a child. In fact, Kako is a big child with all his fear, excitement and mischievousness and, as a non-professional actor he has the ability to portray this character as a real person. In fact, the contrast between his face representing a mature, ugly, middle-aged man and his behaviour betraying a

kind, exited and fearful man makes his character more attractive. In particular, his acting in the last minutes of the film (98:25-100:43) when he portrays a desperate wreck of a person, who cries, shows the potential ability of a non-professional actor in a professional film (Figure 27).



Figure 27: The desperation-racked Kako (1:39:18)

In contrast, Mamo has an intellectual and brave character, and he expresses his leadership by his facial expressions, especially through his eyes. His intonation presents the speech of a leader rather than a musician. However, when he is alone, his face expresses his fear about death. In fact, Mamo mostly acts with his eyes rather than his words. He expresses his strong will when he is with his sons and his fear when he is alone. However, he shows his fear as a desperate person for the first time at the end of the film (98:30-98:45), and this is the best of his acting.

Among the other non-professional actors, Kak Shouan does more acting and has a more distinguished character than the others. He represents a fearful character with the ability to resist Mamo's desires. His body language and intonation indicate a typical old man who wants a peaceful, restful life but external pressures take him away from his calm, ordinary life. Other sons of Mamo and supporting roles present different types of Kurdish people and make the film more believable and realistic for the Kurdish audience. The various characters among the supporting roles (from a young person with a laptop to a rural old man with a musical instrument) reduce the focus on one actor to

present different kinds of emotion and personality; thus, the audience can find a range of natural, spontaneous reactions to particular incidents. For instance, we see the reaction of Mamo's sons to the inspection. 'The natural' reactions of non-professional actors to one another is another consequence of having numbers of them in a scene, like most of the scenes involving Mamo and his sons.

Ghobadi "claimed that sometimes looking for non-actors is very difficult and wastes a lot of time for him, it seems he prefers working with professional actors in some way" (Scarlet, 2007). However, using superstars such as Hedyeh Tehrani and Golshifte Farahani as Hesho and Papoola is not just indicative of his desire to work with professionals. It is his desire to find his way to box-office success in Iran. Hesho and Papoola are two Kurdish singers who do not have a lot of acting but have important roles in the film. These two roles do not require any significant acting, but the task of portraying a Kurdish singer could be very hard for a non-Kurdish actor, even though it does not add anything to the artistic aspects of the film. The captain is another professional Iranian actor who acts with non-professional actors. In the cases of Papoola and the captain, who has an active role in the film, we see that their acting clearly dominates the non-professional actors and it shows significant experience of working with a mixture of professional and non-professional actors. In the inspection scenes (44:07-48:25 and 52:09-58:9), the captain's acting influences the other actors' performances and behaviour, and they mostly react to him. The same thing occurs in the final scenes where Papoola meets Mamo and his sons (88:27-104:35).

Ghobadi also worked with non-professional actors and a professional actor in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. However, there was a difference between these actors and those in *Half Moon*. There are three main characters in the film, played by two non-professionals, Ashkan and Negar, and a professional Iranian superstar, Nader (Hamed Behdad). Although Ashkan and Negar are not professionals, they are real persons in these roles. They are two musicians trying to earn a living as underground musicians and singers, and they act as they live. As Ghobadi (Macaulay, 2010) claims, he simply asked their characters to live, before giving them feedback from his ideas and improving their acting in some cases. Although, in most of the scenes, they are acting with

a superstar, they are not in his shadow because they just live and know everything about their own lives. We see no significant change in their emotions throughout the film. Ashkan represents a young, middle-class musician who is trying to escape his situation and go abroad, and he appears an experienced and calm person in his dealings with society. In contrast, Negar appears more active in dealing with people and finding a solution to their problem; as a woman, she is more emotional than Ashkan. In the dog-abducting scene (65:44-66:30) the difference between the acting of Negar and Ashkan is more obvious, as indicated by their two different characters (Figure 28). In fact, Ghobadi, in his interview with the author, emphasises the role of the director in the performances of non-professional actors and believes that directors like him are responsible for the acting of non-professionals rather than digital cameras (Ghobadi, 2014); however, the difference between the acting in *Half Moon* and in his digital films shows that actors are more comfortable with digital cameras and non-professional actor can act naturally. As I mentioned, Gobadi claims he just asked the actors to live and then added something to it, whereas when working with a 35 mm camera, this way of directing actors is very costly or impossible. . Regarding actors' performances captured with a digital camera, Figgis believes that "what they love is the moment of interaction with another actors and a camera. So what you want to do is give them as many opportunities as possible to do that" (Figgis, 2007, p.103), and this is made possible by the power of the digital camera.



Figure 28: Different acting styles of Ashkan and Negar; the dog abduction scene (1:06:28)

Hamed Behdad (Nader) is a famous professional actor in Iran who has a lot of experience in portraying working-class persons. As a result, he knows everything about his character in the film. His facial expressions and intonation in playing a dealer in films and drink on the black market are realistic and interesting. His ability to change his emotions, which is characteristic of this job, makes this character more attractive. In the court scene in particular (46:08-49:39), he changes his emotions several times but still looks natural and convincing. Another distinguished element of his performance can be seen in his acting with non-professional actors. He does not dominate them but acts just like them, as though he were one of them; thus, his acting seems natural because it is surrounded by non-professionals who are simply living and working in a natural way, and he is acting and reacting to them. In fact, several different factors tend to prevent non-professional actors from performing naturally. One of them is the camera while another is the performances of the professional actors with whom they are working. In *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, the use of digital cameras eliminates one of these problems, while Nader's performance renders the atmosphere of the scenes more natural for the non-professional actors. I would claim that both of these factors are eliminated by digital cameras, the first one directly and the latter indirectly. In other words, non-professional actors feel less pressure from the small digital camera and small crew; thus, they can ignore them and live and talk in a natural way. Moreover, Nader, the professional actor, benefited from the digital camera as he enjoyed greater flexibility and was able to act more naturally, pretending to be one of the non-professional actors; thus he minimised the stress of working and acting as a superstar for the band.

Most of the supporting roles are those of musicians, who act as though they are living as a band. Ghobadi "kept getting ideas from kids and the bands" (Macaulay, 2010) and directed the film in a way that did not inhibit their 'natural' acting. Most of the supporting actors show a part of their life without any special emotion. In fact, they display real characters and, as they are musicians and singers, their characters are attractive to the audience, although they seem like characters in a documentary rather than a drama. Thus, we do not see any special or attractive facial expressions or intonation and body language except from Soroush (75:45-78:00), which is probably part of his natural character as a

rapper. Babak, another rock musician, has an impressive supporting role. Considering his intonation and facial expressions when he talks with the other actors, particularly in the second scene of the film (35:00-02:40), one might rate his performance the best after Nader, who has the leading role. David, another non-professional actor, who plays an old man who forges documents on the black market, also gives a distinguished performance, among others. Although he does not act as a real person, his acting and body language seem very natural and his Turkish dialect helps him to present a comedic character.

As we discussed above, most of the supporting actors do not have attractive facial expressions or intonation and body language, but the attractiveness of the music videos overshadows this kind of acting. This film's attractiveness is not in doubt when we discover that it is Ghobadi's most popular film, as he claims in his interview with the author (2014). In *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, the non-professional actors not only had to appear natural but also had to convincingly represent their characters. Therefore, reducing the stress in scenes was more important for them. This is particularly the case when the director has no written dialogue and relies on the actors to perform as naturally as possible.

### *Directing*

Bahaman Ghobadi is an author-director who desires to shape and control different aspects of his films personally. In *Half Moon*, he uses all factors and elements from lighting to acting to convey his thoughts through the film. It seems as though everything happens simultaneously at the time of filming and that, before that moment, it was just an idea in the director's mind. This means that not having professional actors helped the director to avoid interference by other persons in his ideas and his special view of reality. His special view of Kurdish society is shown by many long shots and extreme long shots of the Kurdish area. As a director, Ghobadi tries to use his film to demonstrate the nature of Kurdistan. In long shots and even in some medium shots, the nature of the Kurdish area dominates the frame. In this film, as in his previous films, Ghobadi tries to portray the Kurdish rural area naturally by showing everything in nature; sometimes, however, the characters do not interact with it, and nature simply provides the atmosphere for the film. In fact, Ghobadi uses nature to shape his actors and make his characters more realistic. For example, in the

scene where Mamo is first introduced (14:26-17:37), he tries to portray him through long shots in a cemetery, so that his silence and his view become more realistic for others. In the open school scene on the hill (19:27- 25:29), Ghobadi uses *mise-en-scene* to put everything in natural positions in order to help the actors' performances become naturalistic, warm and attractive. Ghobadi's ability as a director to bring certain elements together to produce better performances and natural scenes is presented during this scene. In other words, as the actors come up and down the hill, struggling to perform, they are surrounded by nature and other non-professional actors who come and go in medium and long shots (20:51-22:18 and 22:23-23:35); thus, the performances look more natural. Then Ghobadi intercuts these master shots with some medium two-shots in order to have various shots or avoid having to use several takes to catch a perfect master shot. Moving between realistic drama and poetic film is another aspect of the directing of *Half Moon*. Ghobadi focuses on Mamo's silence and his POV in most of the poetic scenes, as well as using slow-motion techniques. Ruiz believes that in poetic films "the rules you need to understand these poetic objects are unique to each film and must be rediscovered by every viewer" (Ruiz, 1995, p.77). In the other words, Mamo's character and the Kurdish rural atmosphere and mountains, in the dim light of a cold winter, prepare the ground for showing some surreal scenes such as the Sufi monastery or Mamo and death. In fact, Ghobadi provides characters and an atmosphere that is sufficient for moving to the poetic and surreal parts (such as facing a girl like an angel who has fallen from the sky on the bus (88:13-89:08)).

In *Half Moon*, Ghobadi mainly worked with locations, characters and pictures to portray his attitude to reality; as he claimed, he was trying to be honest about reality. However, when he talks about reality, he means his experience of life and that of the Kurdish people. He claims, "The reality of my movie is earth-shaking, huge, sad. I didn't want to show all of that directly; I felt that would be bad for the audience and too much for them to bear. I wanted to present this hard reality more smoothly. I wanted to express these difficulties but in a smooth way" (Guillén, 2006). Then he introduces a comedic character, Kako, to the film and shows some poetic scenes because, "If you go to Kurdistan, you see this poetry in the everyday life of the people" (Guillén, 2006). In fact, he is trying to open a window onto his people's minds and their view of the world that

surrounds them. He claims, "I try to balance this harsh reality with a layer of light beauty" (Guillén, 2006). This may be his excuse to move his location to the mountains and roads and, towards this objective, he shows some symbolic places, such as the village of the female singer, rather than showing women in their homes where they are banned from singing.

Ghobadi enters a new atmosphere in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. He has made a film about something new and completely separate from the culture that he used to portray. He jumps from the Kurdish rural area with its working-class people and farmers to the Persian urban middle class in the capital city of Tehran. Thus, these two works, the form of directing and even the desire of the director in making the films are completely different. Ghobadi adopts an interactive method to direct *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. As he claims, he asked real persons to do their jobs and live their lives while he simply tried to dramatise this and shape it into a film (Macaulay, 2010). However, it does not look like a dramatic film or a documentary - it looks like a kind of docudrama with considerable usage of music videos.

Making music videos (particularly for rock and rap music) requires some special techniques and methods in directing. Ghobadi asked to use different kinds of cinematography (using six cinematic lenses) for that part as well. He mixes shots of bands from different angles with different shots of Tehran and its people, which are related to the lyrics. However, for the dramatic part, he tries to stay with master long shots and medium shots, which help non-actors to act and react to one another. For example, he used two different medium three-shots for a scene in Nader's room (08:41- 11:37), mainly two medium four-shots for the underground studio (51:35-53:58), and one long shot in Ashkan's home (15:33-16:33) or car (65:01-66:30). On the one hand, Ghobadi's use of master long shots in the film shows how he tried to take advantage of the digital camera without having to worry about consuming footage or tape, and how he used several takes instead of cutting to close shots to produce the best acting and make the film more realistic. On the other hand, using medium shots shows the limitation of space as they were filming in small, real locations and these medium shots were the widest frames they could take. The use of a hand-held camera in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is different from that in *Half Moon*. The shots are very fast and shaky, like a small camera documentary. In



fact, Ghobadi tries to convey an aesthetic of a realistic documentary through the camera, acting, size of shots and usage of long takes.

## Conclusion

### Subject

Comparing the works of three internationally recognised Iranian directors, we find that digital cameras have played an important role in several of them to move their favourite subject from rural areas and suburbs to urban areas. Ghobadi made all of his films in rural areas and mountains of Kurdistan, and used subjects related to the lives of Kurdish people, although he claimed that his political messages had implications for the whole country. In fact, he preferred to work in the area where he lived and with the people he knows because he was able to deal with them. Even when he decided to make a film about music, he chose Kurdish music as the subject of his film. Kiarostami usually chooses his subjects in rural areas in the north of Iran although his masterpiece *Taste of Cherry* takes place in a suburb of Tehran. However, going to heart of the crowded city of Tehran with its various and complex subjects appeared impossible for both of them (perhaps because of their methods of filmmaking explained later in subsequent sections). Digital cameras give both of them an opportunity to approach urban subjects with their innovative methods of filmmaking. In fact, choosing subjects such as the everyday lives of ordinary people in Tehran or making a kind of docudrama about underground music in Iran are hard to approach without digital cameras. Kiarostami (Kiarostami, 2012) believes that, had he been able to use digital cameras in *Close Up* (1990), his masterpiece made in Tehran, it would have been a different and more impressive film, although it is already ranked 42 in the British Film Institute's "Top 50 Greatest Films of All Time" (Christie, 2012).

Kiarostami tried to present a realistic portrayal of real human lives in his analogue films, and most of the time these people are in rural areas and dealing with other rural people. This means the context is very simple and the people are unsophisticated, although we see some harsh incidents such as the earthquake in *Life Nothing More...* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994). We even notice this simplicity among people dealing with fraud in *Close Up* or suicide in *Taste of Cherry*. However, nothing in "everyday life" in Tehran is simple. This is a very complex context, and the people involved in this situation are not like rural people. Usually they are more complex people as they live in

more complex situations. Thus, the director, who is concerned with the reality of human life, did not approach such subjects until he had equipment that was sufficient for that purpose. The same is true for Ghobadi when he tried to offer a portrait of underground music in Tehran. This subject needs digital cameras, not only because of his method of film-making but also because of the documentary style that is mixed into the film.

Panahi had worked in Tehran. All of his films were made in Tehran, particularly in the downtown area of the city. Although there are many differences between the subjects of *Crimson Gold* (2003) and *Offside*, there are no significant differences between the subjects of *Offside* and *The Circle* in terms of using digital cameras. In fact, Panahi could have filmed this subject with 35mm cameras, but with different scripts and cast. The small digital camera helped him to make *Offside* without a governmental licence and in a documentary context. Thus, the use of a documentary context to show the restrictions on women in Iran distinguishes *Offside* from *The Circle*.

In fact, one of the common points between *Offside* and *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is their documentary parts. Both films are mixed with a documentary, either as a context or as part of the film. Although Panahi could have made his film without a small digital camera by omitting the documentary scenes, it is unclear to what extent this documentary part and context changes the film. He claims that the documentary context is an important factor in his work that makes the film seemingly natural and believable (Firoozan, 2008). We will discuss this point further in the script section.

Ghobadi claims that another similarity between his and Panahi's films is the lack of a licence, a problem faced by many political directors (Macaulay, 2010). In fact, making political or social films in contravention of government rules and criticising social laws are subject to censorship in Iran. Panahi (Firoozan, 2008) and Ghobadi (Biglari, 2009) both claim that they have no licence to film in Tehran. The Iranian government at that time prohibited any film from criticising governmental laws and orders. Showing how women in Iran are restricted by being banned from involvement in any kind of entertainment or showing underground music and young people who are suffering for their art are subjects that the government did not allow them to address. In this case, I

submit that digital cameras enable filmmakers to make films about subjects that the government has banned in Iran. In fact, digital film-making represents a significant turning point in the making of films that contravene governmental control and censorship in Iran.

To sum up, in the Iranian cinematic context, films' subjects play a significant role in the decision to adopt digital film-making by professional and internationally recognised filmmakers. Among political filmmakers such as Jafar Panahi and Bahman Ghobadi, digital film-making allows them to choose more radical subjects. In other words, they choose digital cameras to film subjects that are critical of official policies. For other subjects, a director's method of film-making and his desire to make realistic films and capture 'natural' behaviour (as explained in this chapter) influence the choice of digital filmmaking. Therefore, for Kiarostami and his fellow Iranian film-makers, digital film-making represents a chance to choose more complex subjects and show the perspective of urban people in selected 'real' contexts. For some film-makers, such as Bahman Ghobadi, both of these factors affect their decision to choose this method of film-making.

Logically, the first point, avoiding governmental control and censorship, is the same for anyone in the world who is suffering from any kind of restrictions on their film making practices. However, the second point is mostly related to Iranian neorealism, particularly the work of Kiarostami and his followers. Indeed, digital film-making makes the subject of this kind of film-making more complex and attractive in term of showing urban people and their problems.

### *Script*

The script plays a major role in the choice of certain methods of film-making. All of the digital films analysed in this chapter have partially-written scripts. They are half-written (*Offside*), or 20 pages (*No One Knows about Persian Cats*), or even two pages, such as Kiarostami's work. However, this is not necessarily a characteristic of digital film itself; one must consider other aspects of scripts, as many of the pre-digital works by Kiarostami and Ghobadi have partial scripts. Panahi claims he needed a half-written script because his film had a documentary context and he could not predict or control things in that context, particularly the result of a football match. Therefore, he was forced to use an

incomplete script because of his desire to make a film based on an unpredictable football match (Panahi and Wisniewski, 2006). Thus, before we examine incomplete or partial scripts in depth, we should explain the role of documentaries in these films.

Comparing the digital works of these three film-makers, we note that the documentary is a common factor in all these films, either as the context, the atmosphere of the film or part of it. As explained earlier, Panahi used documentary as a context, which affects incidents, climaxes and many minor points of the film such as the happiness or sadness of the actors and most of the dialogue and reactions. The documentary in *Offside* is a real event and everything seems to happen in real time. Sometimes, the event creates real incidents for the film, such as the struggle between the security officers and the girl when she tries to enter the stadium (11:16 - 11:26), or it affects all the reactions, atmosphere and dialogue, such as the final scene in the minibus.

However, documentary pervades the atmosphere of the film and some shots related to music videos in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. Although Ghobadi claims that he was just following the 'natural' behaviour of the actors, the main structure and ending of the film were devised by screenwriters. On the one hand, the documentary part of the script added some shots of Tehran and its people while, on the other hand, the film is based on a real story and takes the form of a docudrama, as the director claimed at the beginning of the film. Telling real stories in real locations in the form of a docudrama might have been very challenging for a director like Ghobadi, because he had no experience of film-making in an urban atmosphere. In an external urban atmosphere managing a scene is more difficult and there are various factors to contend with, such as noise and people disturbing filming process. Thus, digital film-making encouraged him to attempt this experience. In the music videos, the documentary shots do not affect the dramatic parts in terms of script, but the use of real locations and characters helps the actors to generate more realistic dialogue.

*Ten* does not have a dramatic shape like a drama film, but Kiarostami does not consider it a documentary. It does not even have a structure that some docudramas adopt to portray reality. In fact, Kiarostami lets the actors act in a

documentary context and generate their dialogue and reactions without any dramatic incidents in the context affecting their acting. On the one hand, Kiarostami focuses on characters instead of incidents and events and, on the other hand, the things that happen in context simply allow the whole film to appear natural to the characters and audience. In other words, we can consider two layers in Kiarostami's script or plot for *Ten*: First, showing the crowded city of Tehran from a car and dealing with ordinary activities such as parking and driving, which could be a documentary matter; and, second, the acting and reaction of two characters about the subject of the film, which is designed by Kiarostami. In fact, I submit that the first part is necessary to make the film more realistic but it does not affect the main script, despite what happened in *Offside*.

Indeed, there are three ways of using documentaries in film. Of these three, *No One Knows about Persian Cats* does not have the certain structure which can be considered characteristic of digital film, because Ghobadi used to make films in a documentary context. However *Ten* and *Offside* have some special features in their scripts that are missing in other works by these directors.

Returning to the subject of the partially-written script, I think that *Offside* can be considered a film whose partially-written script is affected by the director's decision to choose digital film-making as his method. Although his previous works have fully-written scripts, this film is based on a real event in progress, logically preventing him from writing a full script before filming. Thus, digital film-making is a more flexible and reliable method for him. The other two directors often work with scripts of just a few pages rather than full ones.

Regarding the structure of the scripts, on the one hand, *Offside* has a semi-three-act classical script with an impressive hook at the start and mini-climaxes, incidents, a climax and a resolution, all of which involve the audience in the story; on the other hand, the characters have certain dramatic attributes such as being vulnerable and empathetic, underdogs and, at the same time, larger than life. Of course we can find all of these characteristics in the group of protagonists (girls) rather than in individuals.

In *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, although we can see the same specifications in the main characters, some of the dramatic lines are lost in favour of showing music videos and introducing another band's music, which is

characteristic of some docudramas that aim to present documentaries about subjects such as art. In fact, the dramatic parts with their climax and mini climaxes lose their importance between the music videos.

As Kiarostami claims in *10 On Ten* (2004), his movie does not follow the classical structure of a script but it has the same attraction for the audience thanks to his method of representing reality. *Ten*'s script has specifications linked to the capabilities of a small digital camera. In fact, Kiarostami's three-page script chooses a subject, characters and the design circumstances of using a digital camera to make a film. This kind of script is definitely designed for this kind of filmmaking and it distinguishes this kind of film and script from others.

To sum up, there are certain characteristics to the scripts of internationally recognised digital work of Iranian cinema. First, specific, partially-written scripts have no classical structure and are designed for digital film-making. Second, they include documentary parts that have live interaction with dramatic parts of the script, as in *Offside*. However, the other specification of these works is similar to the pre-digital work of these film-makers. In fact, these two characteristics are not of equal importance, as the first one contains a new attitude to film and the film industry, as Kiarostami claims in *10 on Ten*, while the second one is simply a matter of the director's taste in using a unique event as the context of a real-time film.

Indeed, the common point in all the digital films that I have analysed is the use of the real world to design the script. However, the way of using it is sometimes unique to digital film-making (*Offside* and *Ten*), although it sometimes simply facilitates digital film-making and encourages the scriptwriter to design it in his script (*No One Knows about Persian Cats*) because of the capabilities of digital cameras.

### *Location*

Two issues concerning locations in digital films have been discussed in this chapter; first, using crowded and urban locations and, second, using real and natural small locations.

All three of these film-makers used crowded and urban locations in their films. Panahi claims he could not set or alternate the stadium and people in the street. He might have used visual effects but these are contrary to his style of film-making (Firoozan, 2008). Thus, digital cameras help him to use real locations (crowded stadiums during a football match and crowded streets at night). However, using a crowded urban location as the context of the film is rare in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. Ghobadi used some parts of crowded streets in Tehran or downtown in music videos to show the atmosphere of Tehran in relation to the underground music. He also uses some shots of actors in the streets or in cars and on motorcycles, which we see in other pre-digital films (but not in his works) and there was no interaction between this real location and the actors, as we see in *Offside*. Although *Ten* is filmed in a car, this car is roaming the streets and highways of Tehran. Thus, we can consider the streets as the background location of the film. In fact, the use of the crowded stadium and chaotic streets after the football match distinguishes *Offside* from the others and shows the importance of using a digital camera for manipulating real locations. Of course, Kiarostami, by moving his favourite location from rural and suburban areas to urban streets, gained the advantage of using a digital camera, but the greater importance of the stadium in *Offside* as the direct location of the acting is undeniable. Driving in the crowded city of Tehran has its own influence in the other parts of the film, including the acting. Thus, the usage of this location for *Ten* is unique and was designed by Kiarostami for this kind of digital film. That is to say, the background location and its interaction with other parts of the film are very important because Kiarostami used to make films in suburban or rural areas in cars, with a 35 mm camera. When he used the streets of Tehran in *Ten*, he was looking for the natural influence of driving in Tehran as a real location on his actors and the story.

Ghobadi used small, real locations to make *No One Knows about Persian Cats* because he wanted to make a documentary about underground music mixed with a drama. Thus, on the one hand he likes to remain loyal to reality and, on the other hand, he was aware of interactions between real locations and real characters. As he chooses non-professional actors for his films and they act in their own character, they perform more naturally in their own locations than in studios or artificial locations. Thus, Ghobadi deliberately used these locations



and, consequently, he needed a small digital camera to obtain proper angles and light. Narrow corridors and staircases, small rooms, and underground studios with real people who work in them make the film more natural and believable for audiences, who have experience of such places and actors. The car in *Ten* can also be considered a real location, although the position of the camera in this location makes it more realistic. For example, in traditional 35 mm films, the camera and its crew occupy a lot of space in the car and, sometimes, using a car mount and other grips can make a car look like a studio instead of a real car. Hence, to what extent can we call this moving studio a car and to what extent can non-professional actors feel free and react naturally in this vehicle? In fact, a small digital camera enabled Kiarostami in *Ten* to use the car as a real location rather than a mobile studio, and to capture the 'natural' reactions of the actors in the car. Indeed, Kiarostami makes the car a real, natural location by using small digital cameras in certain positions. We will explain camera positions in a later section but we should mention the interaction between a location such as a car and a small digital camera as a piece of equipment in digital filmmaking. In *Ten*, Kiarostami makes the car a natural location that reacts with actors and audience in a natural way, such as when it hits a pothole or when the actress tries to park it somewhere.

To sum up, certain characteristics of locations in digital films have been analysed in this chapter: first, the real, crowded location used in *Offside* and, second, the real small locations used in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. However, I would argue that the car in *Ten* might be considered a special small location quite distinct from the cars used in Kiarostami's other films such as *Taste of Cherry* because the camera and crew were not occupying the car and disturbing the cast.

### *Acting*

Working with non-professional actors is characteristic of these three directors' works before and after the digital era. To understand the differences between the digital and pre-digital work in terms of acting, we must investigate each work in detail. Although Kiarostami always likes to work with non-professionals (or, as he calls them, non-actors) to elicit more naturalistic performances, in most of his pre-digital work other factors in the film, such as the camera crew and the limitation and length of the negative, had their own influences on the actors.

Therefore, when we compare the acting in *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*, we find considerable differences in intonation, facial expressions and even body language. Both leading and supporting characters seem natural and real in *Ten*. They seem close to copies of themselves without the camera and in the same situation, i.e. the filming equipment did not influence and turn them into actors, just as Kiarostami had intended.

In *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, Ghobadi used non-professional actors (with the exception of Nader) and most of them act out their own characters, i.e. underground musicians. He even used real locations to produce more naturalistic performances. However, they act according to a semi-structured script and the director's shot list. Therefore, the performances are different from those in *Ten*. In other words, Ghobadi follows his pre-digital method (as he claims in the interview with the author) whereas Kiarostami tries to eliminate all the factors that restrict acting and make it unnatural. In fact, the acting in Ghobadi's digital films shows the influence of other factors such as directing and script. The same is true of *Offside*. The group of leading actors were influenced by several factors such as a half-written script and a director's shot list. In addition they are neither professionals nor real characters playing these roles. As Panahi claims (Firoozan, 2008), on the one hand he chose his cast from among students and non-professional actors based on their acting ability and, on the other hand, they are involved in complex and strange circumstances. Therefore, the performances are unlike those in *Ten*, although they act in a more natural way compared to *The Circle*. In conclusion, we note three levels of natural and believable acting, which I would call more realistic acting. First, in *Offside*, the actors are non-professionals and under the direction of a director (*mise-en-scene* and shot list), with a semi-structured script in unfamiliar circumstances and locations but in front of a digital camera and without the stress of a 35mm camera and its crew. Second, in *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, the actors are non-professionals but are familiar with their characters and to some extent under the direction of a director (*mise-en-scene* and shot list), with a semi-structured script but in familiar locations and circumstances and in front of a digital camera. Third, in *Ten*, there are non-professional actors who are familiar with their characters, and they are under no

pressure of *mise-en-scene* and director's shot list, in front of a small digital camera without a crew.

Based on what we have discussed in this chapter, there are two comparative points between the acting in digital and pre-digital film-making in the works of these three directors. The first is the difference between the acting in digital films and 35mm films, while the second is the difference between the levels of acting in the digital work of these masters of Iranian film.

Based on Kiarostami's ideas about digital acting discussed in his recent interview, I start with the first and general difference. Comparing between the digital and 35mm work of these three film-makers in the first part of this chapter, we find significant differences between the acting (non-professional or professional actors) in the works of each filmmaker. This means that, regardless of each film-maker's methods and how he manages the actors in his works, the acting in digital films seems more natural and more believable. In particular, professional actors in digital works seem more natural and closer to their characters, as Kiarostami claims (Kiarostami, 2012). He believes that, by comparing the work of certain professionals and stars in Iran before and after the advent of digital film-making, we will see an obvious change in their acting, regardless of whether they are working in digital projects or not, as the existence of the digital camera influences them even when they watch other works and homemade videos (Kiarostami, 2012). For instant, when we watch some previous works of Hamed Behdad (Nader), who is an Iranian superstar, such as *Majnoone Leyli* (2008), we can see the difference in his naturalistic performance compared to *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. In *Majnoone Leyli* in particular, he acts the part of a working-class person but his intonation and facial expressions in dealing with people (58:16-62:25) are not as naturalistic as those in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (17:40- 25:38). Furthermore, his amazing acting in a scene (46:08-49:42) in the digital film is more impressive in terms of intonation and body language than his acting in scenes (66:36- 67:12) or (72:34-75:27) in *Majnoone Leyli*. Moreover, some of Nader's petty reactions to the environment, in scenes such as the smithy (31:39-32:20), make him look like a real person in a documentary but at the same time impressive, like an actor. Of course, we can believe that part of these differences in acting is due to the different stories of these two films and the details of the characters but both

films were social films. Furthermore, Ghasem Jafari (the director of *Majnoon Leyli*) is one of the most experienced directors in this genre and an expert at directing professional and non-professional actors. Thus, we can claim that part of these differences in the acting of Behdad is related to the method of directing and digital cameras. We cannot make a similar comparison for non-professional actors because they have no other work for us to compare. However, in previous sections we have shown that the level of acting in digital work for this kind of actor has changed significantly to become more natural. Of course, there are exceptions in some films. For example, I cannot claim that the acting of the Persian soldier in *Offside* (who brings one of the girls) is better than the woman in the box office in *The Circle*, or that all the band members in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* give better performances than the teachers (a man and his wife) in *Half Moon*. Indeed, an assessment of the acting of a non-professional actor is related to several factors including his character, script and the other actors. In addition, the film-makers on whom we have focused are experts in working with non-professional actors. However, as I claimed in previous sections, in general the performances of actors in digital films seem closer to the real world (natural reaction and performance) because the number of factors that prevent a non-professional actor from reacting naturally and spontaneously, such as the bulky camera, the film crew, and the pressure of limited material, are eliminated or reduced in digital film-making. In addition, this claim is based on film-makers' ideas about digital film-making, such as Kiarostami (Kiarostami, 2012), as well as comparing the acting of actors playing similar characters with other actors in 35mm films by the same director. In addition, the interaction of actors with other non-professional actors and professionals in digital films seems more natural. Particularly in *Offside*, we see a number of actors in small locations reacting to one another. This situation shows more naturalistic and professional acting in comparison with simple and uncomplicated situations, with two or three actors, whereas the roles of director and script are undeniable because we see the same situation in *Half Moon*, a 35mm film, in the minibus scenes.

To sum up, although assessment and comparison of the acting in different films and with different characters is not completely reliable, it can partially show the influence of digital filmmaking in helping actors to achieve more natural and

believable performances. In this regard, the main and undeniable point is the fact that the actors are not disturbed by the process of filming (length of film), the crew and the lighting, and they are therefore able to react naturally in the film, particularly if their film roles are the same as their real-world characters. In addition, as Kiarostami claims, digital cameras enable professionals and non-professionals to assess themselves by taking some homemade footage or by watching film of real people living their lives freely in front of digital cameras.

### *Camera (Movement and Angle)*

At first glance, in all of the digital work of the masters of Iranian cinema we notice the shaky shot as the main feature. They did not use tracking, dolly and crane shots or other moving equipment to shoot their films and, with the exception of *Ten*, all of them mostly used hand-held cameras. Of course, using a grip and putting a camera inside a moving car has the same effect as that of a hand-held camera. Therefore, I would argue that all the films took advantage of shaky shots to appear like documentaries or, in other words, to appear more natural and closer to the real point of view. However, it is not characteristic of their digital work, as Ghobadi used this method in his previous 35mm work for the same reason and Panahi used a hand-held camera in most parts of *The Circle* and some tripod shots in *Offside*. Kiarostami had previous experience of fixing a camera in a car, including in *Taste of Cherry*, discussed in previous sections. However, some details are unique to digital filmmaking and the use of small digital cameras. These details are mostly related to camera angles and lenses.

Although we cannot claim that the camera angle in *Ten* is unique to digital filmmaking, placing a 35mm camera inside the car in this position to achieve the same angle as we see in *Ten* would be impossible. Of course, by making certain changes to the car (such as removing the glass to put a 35mm camera and lighting around it) we could achieve such an angle. However, as I mentioned, these methods turn the car into a moving studio rather than a vehicle. In fact, thanks to small digital camera technology, the variety of angles that can be filmed in a car (without disturbing the actors and changing the nature of the car) had increased by the time *Ten* was made. In particular, the specific angle and lens in *Ten* were not aesthetically perfect because a wide lens on the star and high-angle shots (for adult actors) do not offer a good

portrait, but Kiarostami ignored these problems to secure good performances by not disturbing the actors' concentration with the camera, which would have filled a large part of the car.

Kiarostami believes that digital cameras increase film-makers' desire to use hand-held cameras, and sometimes professionals even use this method of shooting inappropriately. For example, they use shaky shots in scenes requiring stability and calm (Kiarostami, 2012). In fact, by putting a small digital camera on the car dashboard, Kiarostami took the opportunity to use shaking shots as well as stationary shots in different scenes of the film as he tried to show the everyday lives of people in Tehran. These moving and quiet shots are completely congruous with the natural life of Tehran and actors' reactions to it. Sometimes, the woman is bored and impatient (24:46-25:52) and sometimes she is active and energetic (26:50-28:02), and this is related to the movement and shaking of the camera fixed in the car.

In his film, Ghobadi used some almost motionless shots to express the feelings and atmosphere of actors and scenes. I mentioned these shots and scenes in previous sections but the main method in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is the hand-held camera, and even in semi-stationary shots we notice a little shaking on the edge of the shots, thus indicating the hand-held camera method. In terms of angles, if we consider the usage of small locations in this film (as we discussed in previous sections), some camera angles are unique for this film. This means that no documentary or movie can provide shots in a small room unless they use a studio instead of a real location. This means there is interaction between location and camera angle, which makes it unique, as Ghobadi and Aslani (2012) claim about small, real locations. However, in terms of aesthetics, we cannot claim the angle to be unique because we can gain the same result in the studio with a 35mm camera.

In Panahi's work, camera movement and usage of hand-held cameras has its specific meaning. He does not stick with a single method throughout a whole film and, according to location, character and script, he uses different methods of camera movement. As we see in his 35mm work, *The Circle*, he may use a tracking shot as though it were taken by a hand-held camera if he feels it expresses his idea about character. Thus, the use of stationary and tripod shots

in *Offside* is not unusual for his work. The use of wide shots in the documentary parts of *Offside* (showing real events in the background) to offer more depth of field is quite typical for this part of the film in order to control everything in front of the camera without the risk of losing focus and showing background events.

In fact, there is a special usage of camera angles in the digital works we discussed. They use some angles not for aesthetic reasons or cinematic meaning but because of the natural situations of the films, which were filmed in real locations. This may be the link between these films and documentaries. Thus, the critic or reader of the film should not interpret the high-angle shots in *Ten* as giving meaning to the characters. The same is true when assessing the usage of lenses to describing emotions or character. Although Ghobadi used several cinematic lenses in the music videos, for the main film he mostly used one lens and shows everything with this view, offering no optical prejudgement to the audience. In this respect, the film resembles *Ten* to some extent.

In conclusion, I cannot point to any unique camera movement or angle, or even usage of any specific lens in these three films. However, there is a special interaction between camera angle and movement and locations in these films. This interaction, which can be seen in some documentaries, could be considered characteristic of these digital films. Considering this characteristic, we should read these films and interpret the shots as a package of interaction between several factors including real circumstances and locations. In other words, we note a kind of facility for using different angles and movement in small, moving locations as a result of the use of digital cameras that we cannot find in Iranian independent cinema. In particular, *Ten* could be considered a completely real digital film experience in terms of camera angles and camera movements that respect the natural circumstances and location of the filming. In other words, digital films are characterised by this interaction rather than specific movements or angles because, as digital cameras become smaller and more flexible, digital filmmakers can use a wider variety of shots and angles.

### *Lighting*

Considering the works of Kiarostami, Panahi and Ghobadi, we can recognise a range of different kinds of lighting aimed at providing realistic lighting by using or supporting natural and available light.

Kiarostami did not use any artificial lights and rigs, as he wanted to avoid influencing his actors. Taking advantage of the digital camera's great sensitivity to light, he even took some shots at night in the car by using the light from passing cars and the ambient street lighting. Although there are no clear shots of the actors at night, the feeling of having natural light and the special characters (such as a prostitute who wants to hide herself in the darkness) who appear in these scenes justify these unclear shots for the audience and give them a realistic feeling about the characters and their emotions. Therefore, the director's decision to stick with natural light throughout the film is made possible by the digital camera. Although taking shots in natural light during daytime is usual, even in the work of some professionals, taking shots at night with no artificial lighting equipment that may disturb the actors is only possible with the help of digital cameras.

Panahi used natural light for most of *Offside* because this film has a documentary context and takes place in a certain time and place (a stadium). On the one hand, natural light increases the documentary feel of this film and, on the other hand, the circumstances of filming prohibited the use of artificial lighting equipment. Thanks to the sensibility of the digital camera, the lighting of closed areas such as the rest room and the minibus can be achieved with natural and available lights. In particular, when the film shows people in the street at night, the capability of the digital camera becomes more obvious.

The various locations in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* and the desire to make a docudrama required a careful lighting strategy, as Aslani explains (Aslani, 2012). As the film is mostly set in closed locations and at night, it was necessary to use lighting equipment and artificial light. However, because of the digital camera's lighting sensibility, they adjusted the small lighting sources with the real (available) light source of locations (organic lighting). In other words, they simply boosted the natural and available lighting of the locations and kept them in their natural state.

In conclusion, respecting the real and natural light is the main concern of the filmmakers when making these digital films. This means either using natural light for the whole movie or boosting the real available light of the location with a little lighting equipment according to the sensibility of the digital camera. In fact,



avoiding the use of bulky lighting equipment and making minimum usage of artificial lighting is a characteristic of these films, but there is range of approaches from *Ten* to *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, and this range is mostly related to script and directing methods.

To sum up, taking advantage of the lighting sensibility of the digital camera by using natural, real, available light and minimal lighting equipment may be characteristic of the digital films of these masters of Iranian cinema.

### *Directing*

According to what we discussed in previous sections, directing in these three film-makers' works has certain differences and common points related to script, cameras and other aspects of film. These range from the works of non-professional directors to those of professional directors, as Kiarostami claims in *10 on Ten* (2004). Of course, these terms are not accurate descriptions of what the directors are doing in these films and they require precise explanations, especially since Kiarostami considers himself a non-professional director in this case.

I have explained the role of the director in these films, as we know that these directors mostly work as authors rather than just as directors of their own films. Kiarostami claims that he simply organises the scene and then leaves his non-professional actors to make 'the reality' in front of the camera. In fact, before turning on the camera and asking the actors to act (or live), he designs the scene in order to eliminate anything that might inhibit his non-actors in giving natural performances, and he does not use a large amount of cinematic equipment (such as lighting and 35mm cameras). As he claims, on the one hand he is returning to the early days of cinema by ignoring cinematic equipment to some extent and, on the other hand, he is discarding *mise-en-scene* by leaving the actors in a car. In fact, he shares his authority with the real world and non-actors to take closer shots of reality (Kiarostami, 2004). He claims, in *10 on Ten* (2004), that he must be a non-professional director to direct non-professional actors in these kinds of movies. I interpret 'non-professional director', in his words, to mean a different kind of director who respects pure reality to express his ideas because he claims that reality exists without any need for a director.

According to Ghobadi's claim about his method of directing, which I explained in previous sections, he tries to get close to reality by interacting with the actors. However, his method is not as open as Kiarostami's and he works in the same way as Kiarostami in the latter's 35mm works. He devises a strong framework for his films before filming and then adds to this with the help of the actors. He asks actors to live and do their jobs, giving them feedback and dramatising their actions to make them like a film. Thus, he makes full use of shot lists and *mise-en-scene* to convey his message. At the same time, he tries to optimise the role of the actors, who are real characters, by choosing master and medium shots and remaining true to reality by choosing real locations and lighting, which could influence the acting of non-professional actors. In fact, we see an interaction between director and actors and other aspects of film in the making of a dramatic film.

Panahi has a different approach to digital film-making as an author-director. In fact, digital film-making gives him certain facilities to make his films in a different way and with different features in a documentary context. He portrays his ideas and views with digital equipment as a professional director; in contrast to *Ten*, this kind of reality does not exist without the director's interference and direction. He uses digital equipment for two reasons: becoming free of restrictions, and using a real live event as the context of the film. Thus, in *Offside*, he shows his professionalism as a director who can interact with real events and portray his view. As a director, he sometimes leads non-professional actors through real, live incidents by taking advantage of the digital camera's capabilities and, as he claims, he decides on his last shot by taking account of any unexpected incident. Although he sometimes made on-the-spot decisions about dealing with the real world, he designs everything, including his locations, and considers *mise-en-scene* and shot lists, trying to control everything rather than releasing it and watching the real world. Indeed, Panahi's method of directing changed in *Offside* as a consequence of making a film in a documentary context and about a live event. But making *Offside* without a digital camera would have been impossible. In other words, digital film-making affected his method of directing indirectly but he still acted as a professional director and was still involved in the main directorial aspects of the film.

In conclusion, digital film-making gives the masters of Iranian cinema an opportunity to interact more flexibly with the real world. Thus, each director can choose his own approach to reality. He may simply make a framework, design an idea, keep out of scene and respect the real world, like Kiarostami. He may ask the real world to contribute to making the film with him, like Ghobadi, and he may lead the real world and direct it when making the film, as Panahi did in *Offside*.

To sum up, the characteristic aspect of digital cinema in the work of innovative and international Iranian directors is their adoption of different approaches to interaction with reality based on their own methods, whereas Kiarostami's method in *Ten* is unique for digital cinema because of the difference between the 35mm and digital cinema equipment.

## **Chapter 4: Prospects of Iranian Digital Cinema: Iranian Digital Special Effects**

The aspects of digital cinema that support the dominant ideology affect the prospects of digital cinema in Iran because it is supported by the government. Therefore, in this chapter I intend to show how digital cinema can support the dominant ideology and find out to what extent the government in Iran would like and is able to continue this trend.

In previous chapters I discussed the low-budget and independent cinema of Iran. However, there is another part of Iranian cinema that, although often ignored internationally, is very important, and is under development; a considerable amount of the government's budget is allocated to this aspect of Iranian cinema. This aspect is trying to occupy a significant place in the international market but has so far failed. All Iranian high-budget films are supported directly or indirectly by the government. In the case of digital cinema and special effects, due to the cost, technical aspects and equipment that it requires, we will therefore consider it as a part of high-budget Iranian cinema. Taking high-budget Iranian cinema into consideration, I can predict its trend due to governmental cultural policy.

In this chapter I intend to investigate why and how a religious ideology supports digital special effects, and I will try to show the future trend of this kind of Iranian cinema. Thus, I will start with an investigation of the potential relationship between cinema and religious ideology by examining the 'cinema of astonishment', and I will show how astonishment acts in the Islamic religion and mysticism that is rooted in the dominant Iranian ideology. In the next step I will discuss other relationships between religion and cinema that may encourage the Iranian government to take over the cinema (as it did). I will then analyse *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) as a case-study to show how religious thought and beliefs are presented and reinforced via digital special effects in the Iranian cinematic context.

Finally, based on the theories that I present in this chapter, I assess the success of *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) in terms of religious cinema and its presentation of the dominant ideology's desires. We should take into consideration the fact that *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) is not only a case-study but was also the first and, until 2010, the only film to be made in Iran by the government using this level of digital special effects.

Finally, on the basis of interviews with some producers involved in high-budget projects in Iran and other experts, I will try to show the prospects of digital special effects in Iran.

### *The Cinema of Astonishment*

Since Auguste and Louis Lumiere's first show, Gunning (1995), in his paper entitled 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment', believed that audiences were not so foolish as to think the train had come through the screen into the Grand Café; rather, they were just very impressed and amazed by the film. He describes the reaction of people when they saw the first film as a kind of astonishment, not panic. He argues that the film struck awe in them because they found a gap between their knowledge and what they saw. Regardless of cause, this sense of amazement and its effect on audiences is what I intend to emphasise, as this will establish my discussion of film and ideology.

We cannot deny that some viewers of *The Arrival of the Train at la Ciotat Station* (1896) react like people who believe in the train like magic and feel panic. Nevertheless, as Gunning argues, the main cause of impression and reaction is something timeless. "The members of the audience oscillated between the sense of immediacy and awareness of that sense: in other words, they experience the same duality of looking at and looking through." (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p.155)

The Cinema of Attraction (as Gunning called it) appears by showing reality in film and it has not disappeared due to the introduction of narrative in films because the cinema industry was deliberately trying to save the power of immediacy in films. The use of directing (like the '180-degree rule') and lighting rules in Hollywood films helps the film show itself as real and puts the audience in the situation of wondering, especially when they watch an amazing or interesting scene. On the other hand, there are several methods of drawing an audience's attention and attracting them to films. In the case of narrative in particular, Joseph Campbell's (1988) theory of the 'power of Myth' is one of the methods that I will explain in more detail throughout the next section about cinema and religion. As Gunning (1995) argues, "a new aesthetic of attraction" was founded by the dizziness and "vertiginous experience" that one can find in other types of entertainment such as the rollercoaster (Bolter and Grusin, 2000,

p156). However, it was superseded by the immediacy and hypermediacy of cinema over time. Despite reference to Erkki Hohtamo's (1995) idea that technologies such as Imax and Cinerama have been trying to rehabilitate the Cinema of Attraction since 1995, it can be traced to any cinematic techniques and narrative forms that have aimed to attract audiences by vertiginous experiences such as those in Hitchcock's works (Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

The ability of cinema to impress the audience's minds has been considered since the early years of cinema and one can find this awareness among cinema theorists and film-makers such as Eisenstein in his attempts to affect an audience with Marxist theory. As Manovich (2001) mentioned, this idea was preceded by psychology theory on the ability of cinema to act against real-world laws and reproduce objects and events in the mind. According to this notion, when virtual reality is introduced to the cinema through the use of computers, the capability of objectifying the world increases due to the power of digital cinema. He also states that Jaron Lanier's idea about virtual reality that takes over part of the human mind in a way that external reality, internal object of the mind and mind processes was not determined. In fact, As Rheingold explained "The cyberspace experience is destined to transform us in other ways because it is an undeniable reminder of a fact we are hypnotized since birth to ignore and deny – that our normal state of consciousness is itself a hyper-realistic simulation" (Rheingold, 1991, p.377). Indeed, we always believe that the mental model of the world in our mind is an objective world. "That simulation capability is where human mind and digital computers share a potential for Synergy" (Rheingold, 1991, p 378).

As Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue, the digital special effects in Hollywood blockbuster movies trigger "a sense of wonder" in an audience similar to that in early cinema. A lot of people experienced amazement and wonder when they watched *Jurassic Park* (1993) by Spielberg or *Terminator 2* (1991). Bolter (2000) believes that this amazement is a consequence of "awareness of medium". Based on this idea, "we go to such films in large part to experience the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy produced by special effects" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p. 157). Thus, it seems that this sense of wonder pays a compliment to technology that is able to produce something that looks like reality, since today's audience is completely aware of fake objects

that are generated by computers. “The amazement comes only the moment after, when the viewer understands that she has been fooled. This amazement requires hypermediacy, and so the double logic of remediation is complete” (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p 158).

As described, there are two different approaches to amazement caused by watching digital special effects in films. First, as Gunning (1995) argues and Bolter (2000) emphasises, this sense of wonder and amazement is preceded by the audience’s awareness of the medium and their ability to recognise the difference between what they see and what they believe to be real. Thus, it acts against the endeavour to achieve transparency in film. This is obvious during a century when consciousness about cinema and its immediacy was raised, and nowadays most digital cinema audiences know about the ability of technology to objectify anything the film-maker wants to show. In that case, astonishment represents the audience’s praise of technology. Scott E. Anderson (2011), an Academy Award winner and professional visual effects supervisor who has recently been involved in Iranian cinema, believes that the goal of astonishing the audience by digital special effects has now been achieved but the demand for astonishment will increase and require more imagination.

The second approach is less complicated. It is based on what Manovich (2001) mentioned as a psychological notion and also the attempt of the entire film industry to make the medium of cinema more transparent. According to this idea, the audience temporarily lose their consciousness about the medium and feel panic, astonishment, sadness or happiness because of what they are engaging with. In fact, the human mind adopts virtual reality as the real world and reacts to it. Therefore, as digital cinema develops and special effects become more realistic, audiences find it more convenient to forget the real world and float in virtual reality. By this notion we can explain the attempt of the cinema industry to produce more realistic special effects and improve the impression of cinema by using 3D pictures and IMAX in an effort to help people suspend their recognition of the medium, flying in a realm of fantasy and feeling and acting as though it were real, even for a moment.

Clarifying the last argument above, I should mention the recent stage of digital cinema used in my case-study. Lansdown recognised three stages in the usage



of computing within visual art and design: “tool, medium, intelligent apprentice”. The second stage, medium, is “where artists, designers and directors begin to create things that have never been done before. The results achieved by the computer-generated techniques used in these movies would have been very difficult, if not impossible, with traditional techniques” (Baker 1993, p.41). This stage of using computer-generated images is applied in *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010), and James Cameron is a pioneer of this usage of computer-generated image (CGI) in his films *Abyss* (1989) and *Terminator 2* (1991). On the other hand, Manovich approaches this process as Digital Composing which “allows moving images of non-existent worlds, brings together within the shot different times and places, even virtual” (Manovich, 2001, p.153). These shots that are generated from the real world and animation “no longer have to represent vision of a real time and place and thus the traditional delineations between animation and live-action blur (Daly, 2008, p.137). In this kind of cinema, everything can be represented as real. In fact, “the illusion of the real has had to be made more realistic” (Hayward and Wollen, 1993, p.2). Therefore, returning to the Scott E. Anderson interview, we have everything we need to astonish people with digital cinema; all that is required now is some imagination (or sources from religion).(Moazezinia, 2011)

### *Astonishment in Religion and Mysticism*

Iranian cultural and social discourses are influenced by the dominant religious ideology rooted in certain mystical beliefs in Islam such as *velayat* (obeying a spiritual leader). Some of these ideas can be traced to previous governments and kingdoms starting from the Safaviah Kingdom (Shariati, 1972). *Velayat* in the Persian language is based on the root *vali* which means the perfect spiritual person who aims at the creation of mankind. As Attar (11AD), one of the famous spiritual mentors of Sufism in Iran, has mentioned in his books, in Sufi stories a special power is attributed to the *vali* that enables him to do wondrous works. For these reasons, Sufi scholars such as Nasafi and Ibn Arabi believe that the *vali* should be recognised and obeyed because “*vali* and prophets are in same level and *vali* knows about inward message of God” (Aria, 2008, p.104). In the contemporary Iranian social discourse, the term *vali* has been mistaken for the leadership of the clergy (Safavi, 2010). This has revived the term in public spheres as well as films. In fact, there are controversies about the

concept of *vali* in Iran, particularly when we want to talk about politics and discuss the eligibility of *Velayat Faghih*. However, returning to the history of that concept in Sufism, most Sufis believe that the *vali* is one who is close to God and acts as a medium between people and God (Moeinodini, 2006). This idea was organised in the shadow of shii thought, and some great shii Sufi theorists such as Najmedin Kobra believed that the *vali* has the ability to change the world and do wondrous works (Yazdimotlagh, 2002). Since I consider *vali* to be a wonder worker, I try to theoretically show the role of astonishment in mysticism - particularly Islamic mysticism - before analysing the film and describing how it can be achieved through digital cinema.

In Islamic mysticism, astonishment has two different meanings and usage. First it is staged as an approach to God where a disciple falls under the shadow of the absolute light and power of God. It looks like the blindness afflicting a person who looks at a great source of light. Attar (11AD), a great Sufi and preceptor, describes this stage as an area where a disciple loses his way, his knowledge and even himself (Attar, 1994).

The second meaning of astonishment in mystical belief is the mood of a person when he faces something that is very great and beautiful or complicated and paradoxical. According to this idea, whenever a seeker finds something very beautiful (facially) or very complicated (logically) and cannot digest it with his senses or mind, it becomes astonishment and it is the mood that enables him to be the recipient of more blessedness and knowledge from God. Rumi (13 AD), a poet and spiritual preceptor of Islamic mysticism, explains this situation through the story of a camel and a bird that become friends, with the bird inviting its friend to its house. In fact, its house is ruined as a result of this invitation (Rumi, 1987). The mind of the seeker is like a nest and it cannot tolerate a guest like the glory of absolute beauty or knowledge. We can find two sources of mystical astonishment in Rumi's poetical work, *Mathnavi Manavi* (13 AD). He uses astonishment versus intellect when he tries to show the greatness of absolute knowledge of God and the weakness of the mind. He believes that people should not trust intellect in the matter of spiritual and holy things. Indeed, a seeker, when faced with something great, logically paradoxical and at the same time respectful, is astonished and accepts that truth as something holy and beyond his mind. He stops to look for cause and effect and opens his heart

to embrace the pure reality (Rumi, 1987). This whole process starts with astonishment. The other attitude to astonishment that is approved by most Sufis like Rumi (13AD) considers astonishment as pure love. In this case, the disciple faces pure beauty in something and then experiences astonishment, losing his logical mind and falling in love. Indeed, the beauty may belong to the material world, such as the face of a woman or a part of nature, but at the same time it is a reminder of the creator and evokes a sense of praise. However, while the beauty is accomplished and perfect, the man's first emotion is astonishment, which is the introduction to praise and love for the source of beauty (Rumi, 1987). In this opinion, astonishment is an introduction to love, and love is the key factor in Islamic mysticism. Rumi (13 AD) sometimes applies astonishment versus love and sometimes versus the mind. Thus, we can recognise the strong relationship between love and astonishment.

Explaining aspects of astonishment in Islam, however, we should consider two relevant issues concerning beauty and the mind as subjects for astonishment. Art is something related to beauty while a miracle is something related to the mind and should be stated as such in this regard.

Miracles or works of wonder can astonish the faithful people; they conquer their minds and they obey the wonder worker and follow his ideas. Hojviri (11 AD) a great Sufi theorist and author of *Kashf Al-Mahjub* believes that all Muslims believe in the wonder work performed by the *vali* (spiritual leader), and he also believes it is different from miracles in some way. Nevertheless, wonder work is the most popular image of mysticism among the common people and at the same time they are very impressed when they follow the wonder worker after being astonished. In fact, the wonder work causes people to obey the *vali* through astonishment. "In Islamic mysticism, the astonished disciple prepares to achieve a new level of faith" (Razazifar, 1998, p. 190). Accepting the miracle and obeying the rule of the prophet is mentioned several times in the Holy Quran. For example, after seeing the miracle, the disciples of Jesus said "Our Lord, we have believed in what you revealed and have followed the messenger Jesus, so register us among witness" (Ali Imran, Verse 53). This is different from the astonishment that I will describe when analysing *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) later in this chapter.

Art is another relevant subject that I should mention in regard to beauty and astonishment because most of the time we find beauty through art. It does not necessarily require more than common sense to discuss the ability of different kinds of art to present or represent the beauty of the world, nature or the human mind. Sufis sometimes describe as an art the creation by the creator and invite people to be astonished. Most of the poetry by mystical poets such as Hafez (14 AD) point out astonishment in the presence of natural beauty as a metaphor for holy beauty.

As Soroush (1992) explains, for a mind that is accustomed to the material world, it is very hard to believe in another world and the truth behind superficial objects and events. Thus, such people are unable to accept and believe in the miracles of saints and prophets. However, the mind that is accustomed to experiencing surprise and wonderment at signs of God in the ordinary world has the capability to deal with more serious spiritual knowledge from God. I intend to draw attention to this notion of explaining the relation between art and beauty. I think the art contained in beauty can trigger a sense of wonder in people and therefore work against the philosophical mindset of the unbeliever.

### *Cinema and Religion*

Talking about the prospects of digital cinema in the Iranian discourse, which is influenced by the dominant religious ideology, I point out the relationship between religion and cinema in order to investigate the desire of the dominant ideology to take over cinema and the facilities that digital cinema offers the dominant ideology to present its myths and values. We should also focus on the importance of the representation of myth as a source of belief and values in religious ideology and argue that digital special effects are trying to represent the myths people imagine according to the source of these myths in textual sources of religions such as Islam.

Some religious scholars such as Melanie J. Wright (2007) believe that religion has not been defeated or replaced by cinema: "it has colonised it, and has found itself challenged and altered in the course of the encounter. Religious ideas, rituals and communities are represented or alluded to in a dizzying number of films" (Wright, 2007, p.2). To illustrate this, she points out that plenty of movies in the history of cinema have used or adapted Bible stories to

emphasise morals in stories, even using the Passion plays. She gives another instance that is more relevant to this dissertation. "In present-day Iran, a country governed by *sharia* (Islamic religious law), film-making is a highly regarded profession. Yet in the late 1970s it was one of the revolutionaries' favourite targets, and arsonists, stirred up by religious rhetoric, destroyed over 180 cinemas" (Wright, 2007, p.23). She also mentions cinema-goers in India who go to the cinema barefoot and pay their respects by showering the screen with petals. Darrol Bryant (1982) believes that cinema is a kind of public religion that works like a religion for the public. Other scholars generalize it to certain arts and state: "If art cannot give a direct representation of the dimension of the holy, it can nonetheless perform an alternative religious function" (May & Bird 1982, p4). Wright (2007) adopts the term *photogénie* from Jean Epstein to distinguish cinema from other arts based on its ability to exert strong and rapid influence on the audience. "As an intensely experienced moment, when one is overwhelmed by the screen image, *photogénie* is personal, subjective and essentially indescribable. Epstein's description at times comes close to classic articulations of the nature of religious experience" (Wright, 2007, p.171). In fact watching a movie is not like seeing a picture on screen; it is a kind of experience that the audience feels and he or she lives with it for some time.

I do not intend to emphasise the equation of cinema with religion because, as some scholars (as John C. Lyden (2003) pointed out in his book), believe that the cinema in comparison with real religion suffers from a lack of depth. At the same time, however, I cannot deny the influence of this medium in different ways and in this case it obviously takes the place of religion to some extent and it affects people in terms of worldview, ethics and values. Lyden mentions that "some authors have recognized the religiouslike quality of cinema even as they dismiss it for its lack of depth in comparison with "real" religion. Such an approach fails to take film (or popular culture in general) seriously enough to provide a measured assessment of it." (Lyden, 2003, P3). He then "seeks to address this problem by developing a method for understanding film as performing a religious function" (Lyden, 2003, p3).

We can adopt another view of this subject based on the approach of scholars to cinema that is theological or ideological or a combination of the two. As Lyden (2003) describes, the ideological approach attributed to film studies and

concerns about aspects of film has the ability to apply critiques in terms of race or class hegemony. The theological approach investigates an analogy between ideas represented in a film and a doctrine in a religion. Lyden (2003) believes the ideological analysis of films investigates the ways films influence people indirectly but it sometimes overlooks methods with which a film may affect the values and beliefs of viewers. I adopt the ideological approach when I analyse *The Kingdom of the Solomon* (2010) in this chapter but I should mention another aspect of cinema that opens a new window for our research besides the notion of the Cinema of Attraction for investigating myth, values and ritual in film that Lyden highlighted. In this case, rituals are a way of uniting myths (that present worldviews) and values (that present an ideal world). Lyden (2003) adopts the works of Clifford Geertz (1973), defines these three terms and adapts and applies them to film. He points out the importance of the awareness of the relationship between viewers and films in that “The viewer may be well aware of the artificial nature of this filmic reality, and yet it still has the power to affect the way we think and act in the reality that exists outside the cinema” (Lyden, 2003, p.4).

Talking about myth, especially in the case of cinema, we should mention Joseph Campbell's influence on cinema, particularly on the *Stars War* (1977-1983) series, which were among the first films to make extensive use of digital special effects. Joseph Campbell (1988), in a TV series entitled *The Power of Myth*, explained the different kinds of heroes that are represented in different stories by different faces. There are physical heroes, who overcome difficulties and sacrifice themselves for others, and spiritual heroes, who “experience a supernormal range of human spiritual life and then come back and communicate it” (Campbell, 1988). He mentioned Buddha, Moses and Christ as spiritual heroes, all of them as myths giving one to another, which Campbell (1988) defines as a “transformation of consciousness”. Although he appreciates the narratives of *Star Wars* (1977-1983) for adopting the metaphor of myth, the greater influence of these films can be seen in the values presented via the digital special effects used by George Lucas. Obviously, the fact that this new method of presenting myths and heroes (using digital special effects) has been continued by other film-makers distinguishes *Star Wars* (1977-1983) from previous works. I can add *The Matrix* (1999) as another signpost in this regard.

Blizek (2009) argues that “*The Matrix* is a very popular movie in which people have found both orthodox and Gnostic Christian ideas” (Blizek, 2009, p.20), and the high quality of digital special effects are used to represent a modern myth and hero. Blizek believes that religious stories such as David and Goliath have transcended and generated a new myth in cinema several times over. However I think that retelling a story is different from representing it in film, and in the case of *The Matrix* (1999) digital special effects play a big role in the transcendent myth. S. Brent Plate (2008) mentions this difference between retelling the story by narrative in *The Matrix* (1999) or *Star Wars* and the audio-visual recreation of this story by film, which he describes as recreating a world. In fact, this world is “the visual portrayal of the differing mythical worlds that are created on screen” (Plate, 2008, p.225). Returning to Lyden’s idea (2003), he is aware of using myth as a derogatory term and he tries to develop this view because of its religious power. For him, myth contains and conserves the values and worldview of society in the shape of a story, and by using these stories, film empowered and conveyed messages of “modern myth”. “Films offer a vision of the way the world should be (in the view of the film) as well as statements about the way it really is” (Lyden, 2003, p.4). The first part is done by representation of myths and the values that they present as part of their character.

I would like to explain further the influence of cinema on audiences in terms of religious films. This approach to interaction between the audience and cinema will be useful when we analyse the film and discuss the perspective of digital cinema in Iran as a medium for showing religion. Plate (2008), in his paper named ‘*Filmmaking and World making: Re-Creating Time and Space in Myth and Film*’, describes a moment of watching film in the twenty-first century movie theatre that is close to Gunning’s description of the audience in the Grand Café in the early years of cinema, but in a different way. He talks about audiences that “Leave their worries behind; anticipating instead a new and mysterious world that will soon capture their imaginations” (Watkins, 2008, p219). He believes that cinema, like religion, has the capability of making a world like religion and this world-making is more effective for the audience because of the audio-visual power of cinema to show its new world. I would like to add digital special effects as tools for making this influence more effective and believable.

Although Plate (2008) believes that, “Due to the prominence of mass media in our lives, we can no longer claim that anything is more real than anything else, including the gods and goddesses” (Watkins, 2008, p.227), at the same time he distinguishes cinema with its audio-visual character from textual mass media. Thus, he recognises two aspects that affect people in the cinema: on the one hand the method and technique of film (visualisation), and on the other hand the consideration of film as a medium of the mass media and supported by them.

Plate believes that, “World making, like filmmaking, is an active intervention into the space and time of the universe” (Plate, 2008, p.221). In fact, film-makers, by using audio-visual techniques, recreate a world in space and time and, by adopting digital special effects, use the latest technique or make time and space. In modern cinematic myth, one realises an intensive effect of film that is achieved not just by narrative, picture and sound; the audience is overwhelmed by film and in this regard digital special effects act as the last part of the final cause of this effect.

I should mention religion and cinema in Iran as a final point in this section. Pak-Shiraz (2011) discusses the influence of religion on cinema after the Islamic revolution and studies religion in Iranian film, adopting different approaches (formalistic, philosophic and mystical) to the religion (Shia). Pak-Shiraz also investigates the popular expressions of Shia in films. In fact, in the case of Iran, “religion finds a new medium of expression through modern secular inventions” and media (Pak-Shiraz, 2011, P163). Discussing recent Iranian cinema and spiritualism, she mentions *sinama-ye ma’nagara* (spiritual cinema) as a new section of the Fajr International Film Festival which has also been a trend in Iranian cinema since 2005 supported by the government. Although we cannot find a comprehensive and clear definition of *sinama-ye ma’nagara*, it can be considered a turning point in relations between cinema and religion in Iran. “What is significant is the recognition of cinema’s legitimate participation in discourses on religion and spirituality and, more importantly, cinema’s ability to articulate its own religious or spiritual discourse. This has opened up a new arena that employs a completely modern medium to express religious and spiritual ideas, and an opportunity to retell in a new dimension both the truths of a fifteen- century-old religious tradition as well as the numerous facets of its expression and experiences” (Pak-Shiraz, 2011, P65). Considering these points



one could predict that Iranian government would have encouraged a project such as *The Kingdom of Solomon*. The production company and investor in this big budget project was the Farabi Cinematic Foundation which had launched and supported *sinema-ye ma'nagara*.

## The Kingdom of Solomon

*The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) is an Iranian big-budget film supported and funded by the government. The film was made by a group of Iranian professionals; it was directed by Shahryar Bahrani, who has made several successful films and TV series, and produced by Mojtaba Faravardeh, an Iranian expert producer. As the first film in Iran to use digital special effects in various aspects, and despite the considerable budget involved, it still presents a unique experience in the Iranian cinema.

The story of this film concerns Solomon, the prophet of the Israelites in ancient times. He is informed that devils (Satan and the Jinni's forces) are coming to the human world aggressively with the intention of affecting people directly. As a prophet and King of the Israelites, he gathers the heads of the tribes in Jerusalem to talk about the new situation in the country and to ask them to help. However, most of the heads of the tribes who lead the nation as great Jewish priests deny him and reject his command. Thus, he decides to defend the Jewish nation with his army and a few commanders. The war starts with an invasion of evil spirits attacking people and cities. They conquer the souls of some people and make them like zombies, screaming and killing others. Solomon and his army deal with the problem but the heads of the tribes, Yazar and other great priests of Jerusalem try to weaken Solomon, intending to conquer the country and unite with the Jinn's forces. While Solomon is fighting on the far side of his country and exorcising evil spirits from the people, Yazar and his forces try to conquer Jerusalem. Solomon, when informed about what is happening in Jerusalem, builds a big ship and God takes him and his army to his capital by the force of the wind. When the flying ship lands on Solomon's temple all the people are amazed. He defeats the Yazar forces and, with God's permission, visualises Satan and the Jinn for the people and orders his army to arrest them.

As this chapter is about digital special effects I intend to analyse this film based on this phenomenon in an Iranian film. I do not analyse the whole content of the film as in previous chapters, but I will refer to some other scenes to which it may indirectly relate.

In analysing the scenes that use special effects, we sometimes investigate a technique used by a film-maker and assess it as clumsy or professional. However, in both cases the effectiveness of these techniques for Iranian audiences (who do not access perfect special effects in modern cinemas) is more important than the perfection of the technique.

The special effects used in this film can be divided into two categories. The first type of digital special effects help art directors to arrange scenes, decorate locations and add accessories and objects (such as trees, ships and so on) to the scene. The second type of digital special effects represents fantasy and unreal objects, such as creatures and events like the Jinn or flying ships. My main focus is on the second type because this kind of digitalisation attempts to reproduce the myth and raise the audience's level of amazement.

The name of the movie suggests to audiences that they are about to see a mysterious as well as a mythical film, because Solomon is one of the famous mythical figures in Islam who has affected several aspects of Islamic civilization. From literature to politics and from mysticism to art, one can find many stories, notions and theories that are partially related to Solomon, the ancient prophet and King of the Israelites. Therefore, the audience expects to see unusual and imaginative scenes, which cinema offers. Thus, *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) begins with a mysterious scene of connecting with the Jinn, which is part of the religious beliefs in Islam and some other religions. This means that the first scene of the film contains the first digital special effect. With this opening, the film-maker invites the audience to view an unusual film in terms of Iranian cinema. However, the special effects that are used in that scene are not a special visualisation but only a ghost like a flame and smoke that contains a horrific body. The sight of Jinn or Satan for Iranian people, who hear a lot of horror stories about these creatures, may be more frightening, as well as amusing, for them than for other audiences from other cultures and nationalities. Thus, starting a story with an image of a Jinn materialising is a

strong opening but the special effects that are used in this scene are insufficiently professional to satisfy professional audiences. One cannot see any effects and shadows from the smoke and flames in the scene which make it look like unrealistic animation.

The second scene, in the eighth minute, which obviously uses digital special effects, contains some natural scenery. Although the long shot of the scenery seems realistic in terms of the lighting, colours and actors' movement, an unrealistic backlight is seen in the medium shots of actors, betraying the usage of the blue screen technique in the scene. This scene, which continues with a white horse and other galloping horses, is trying to present a beautiful and peaceful background for the whole story. The film-maker uses digital special effects for both antagonist and protagonist. The presentation of the Jinn in a dark and terrifying scene and the presentation of Solomon against a beautiful natural background both use digital special effects in order to exaggerate their contrasting situations, as all myths deserve. The scene of galloping horses in Solomon's dream is part of the digital special effects that try to portray the idea of Solomon in nature symbolically.



Figure 29: Zabulun scenery, 1:08:13 (The use of blue screen to create the seashore).

The extreme long shot of Jerusalem is another scene that uses digital special effects to confirm the creation of time and place of the story and to present it more realistically. To sum up, most of the extreme location long shots partially use digital special effects and the film seems to be successful in the creation of an ancient place. From the fifty-first minute, we can see another kind of special effect that begins with shining words, the sign of a skull and smoke that passes over the land on its way to Jerusalem. The first one is the reminiscent of the scene from *The Lord of the Rings* when the ring is heated in the fire and reveals

its sign shining in the flame. It is also seen in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) when Gandalf throws the ring into the fire to reveal its magic power, and the shining words appear on the ring to show that it belongs to evil. In this film the dark magic in the ring is a tool for controlling the world (Fowkes, 2010). In *The Kingdom of Solomon*, the wizard puts the skull into the fire and similar shining signs appear to reveal the evil concealed in the skull. Thus, the same visual effect is used as a symbol representing the same thing. The smoke is reminiscent of the smoke-shaped monster in *Lost* (TV series 2004-2010), which will be discussed later in the Jinn section. Both the shining signs and the smoke are representations of Satan and evil forces. I think that the scene of the smoke following its victim is not a perfect use of this special effect because one does not see its shadow when it flies under the sunshine.

From the sixty-sixth minute, when the Jinn attack Zabulun, a series of more complicated special effects are employed. First, shining spheres (Figure 32) roam around the city market; then smoke (Figure 31) like a flailing snake appears everywhere. Finally the shapes change into various terrifying things such as the claw of a monster and so on, penetrating human bodies. Although these special effects are not particularly complex, the utilisation of them is elaborate. I think the film-maker deliberately chose a cloudy day for this scene to avoid having to do some fine work that would have been necessary to deal with the shadows of these smoke monsters. Another point mentioned before and explained in more detail in this scene concerns the use of smoke to represent the Jinn. This scene is the best of the Smoke-Monster scenes in the movie, despite the claim of some critics that the use of smoke is simply imitating the *Lost* (2004-2010) TV series. Those who are partially informed about Islamic beliefs know that representing Jinn as smoke is implied in the Holy Quran: "And created Jinn from fire mixed with smoke" (Ar-Rahman, Verse 15); thus, the use of this kind of visual effect refers to this interpretation of the Quran. Using different angles and helicopter shots, mixing them with moving smoke and finally introducing zombies (people affected by the Jinn and moving and acting like zombies) make this part of the film more effective and horrific for audiences. This part of the film, which ends with Solomon's exorcism of the Jinn from the people in the seventy-seventh minute, is one of the parts that may satisfy both ordinary audiences and religious supervisors of the film in its representation of



the Jinn. It represents and confirms the myth of the Prophet and spiritual leader regarding the salvation of the people by the visualisation of evil forces.



Figure 30: Zabulun under attack by Jinn, 1:06:55 (before and after applying visual effect)

In the eighty-fifth minute, some digital special effects are used to show ships at sea, and the darkness of the scene makes it more realistic. These ships constitute the most complex digital special effects in *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010). When the wind blows and tornados appear in the eighty-seventh minute, the film portrays his destiny via digital special effects. This is the beginning of what made *The Kingdom of Solomon* unique in Iranian cinema or

what marked it as an unsuccessful experience (according to critics). Although the extreme long shots from the flying ship in the eighty-ninth minute are not very clear, they are enough to intrigue the audience about the next scene and to impel them to watch the miracle that most of them heard about in childhood. Thus, the ninetieth minute is the moment of amazement. This is when one sees astonishment in the faces of all the actors in the film, and the film-maker wishes to see these kinds of faces among viewers of the film. The dusty wind helps the film-maker conceal some awkward techniques used in the flying ship and shows the scene more realistically.

In the landing scene, the close-up shots of the flying ship are digital and rely on dust to make it unclear and more realistic, as most film-makers do.

From the ninety-fourth minute, we see some special effects that show the light, the sky and a view of the city under the shadow of this light. This is another moment where the actors express their astonishment but it is not something that audiences may be astonished by. There is another shot that shows Solomon's Temple in the middle of a green area, suggesting that it may be the attitude of the light (the light is a spiritual creature) to Jerusalem. Finally, Solomon approaches the light and it dissolves into him. For the film-maker, this is the time for dissolving myths, and it has a special value for him and supporters of the film. The light is a great Islamic myth, Ilia (Ali), and the film-maker is trying to show the dependence of ancient myth on Islamic myth. The use of the light is based on the mystical and philosophical idea of light in Islam that is obviously utilised in the whole of the film. The special effects used in this part are simple and are not something that digitalisation has changed or distinguished from laboratory analogue special effects that were used in cinema before.

The last part of the digital special effects is demonstrated from the ninety-sixth minute with the materialisation of the Jinn. The film-maker uses digital characters and creatures that interact with real characters as the technique to confirm the myths and beliefs of Muslims about this part of Islam. The director uses certain methods to present this creature more realistically. First, he uses colour and material for those creatures that are close to the smoke (the material that is used to represent them in the previous scene). Second, he avoids

focusing on them and most of the time we have just a brief view of them or see them in the background or in the margin of the shot. Finally, he uses some real objects and accessories and connects to them, such as a cobweb or cord, to make it difficult for the audience to distinguish between real objects and digital ones. All of these methods help the film to hide some awkward digital special effects. This does not mean that the film is not professional in visualising the moment of the materialisation of the Jinn. This level of digital special effects is used in several films made in Hollywood. However, my concern in this chapter is to examine the effectiveness of this kind of digital special effect to revive the sense of sympathy that the dominant ideology needs when funding a big project like this. To explain, I should mention some comedy movies made in Hollywood that use ordinary digital special effects, such as *An American Werewolf in Paris* (1997). In this kind of movie, the film-maker simply wishes to imply something strange or horrific and is not afraid that a smart audience might recognise the difference between virtual reality and reality itself. When an audience discovers a trick, it makes them laugh, which is the ultimate goal of these films. However, the goal and message of *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) require the audience to believe in the reality of the film and even be astonished by it.

### *Influence of The Kingdom of Solomon*

Leo Lo, the Oscar-nominated supervisor of digital special effects in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), supervised two groups of technicians simultaneously to support and improve the work: one in Iran and the other in Hong Kong.

In an interview with Fars Press, he claimed that there are two kinds of digital special effects in this film. The first part is related to colour correction and correction of the scenes and buildings (Figure 29), while the second is related to the creation of the mythical creatures (Faravardeh 2012). Although the former has broader use in the future of Iranian cinema, I will focus on the latter in this chapter because I am investigating the prospects of digital cinema and the development of digital special effects in Iran and any other religious developing country supported by large sums of government capital required for this kind of digital cinema. In reference to the theoretical investigation conducted earlier in this chapter and according to most critics and reviews of the film, the most important part of the film that grabs the audience's attention is the special



effects that create the mythical creatures and miracles. There are various reasons for this. First, showing the mythical creatures and miracles stimulates the sense of wonder and amazement in the audience. Gunning argues that, in the cinema of attraction, people who are partially aware of the power of cinema to deceive them and the virtual reality of the picture (for example a flying ship) at the same time are astonished and amazed by the oscillation between these two facts. Second, showing myths and values in film, as Campbell and other scholars assert, affects the way in which people regard religions. They use the same methods to affect people. Third, the generation of these creatures and events is technically more complicated and dependent on the digital era than any other digital special effect such as colour correction and scene correction. This means that this kind of digital special effect is characteristic of digital cinema and we recognise the digitalisation of cinema through the use of digitally unreal creatures or events and locations.

### *Jinn*

According to several interpretations of the Holy Quran, Jinn are creatures that God has created before human beings to inhabit the earth, and Satan is considered one of them. They are invisible to human beings but they can affect people's minds. They could be good or evil (Tabatabaei, 1988). Sometimes, however, Jinn-like demons are considered evil spirits in religious texts and cultures.

In several scenes from the beginning of the film (the second minute) to the end, we see the smoke-shaped creatures named Jinn roaming and flying around and in the sixty-ninth minute attacking people and conquering their souls. These creatures, which are symbols of evil, are represented by dark smoke based on Islamic beliefs about them.

In the second minute, the film-maker tries to influence and terrify the audience with strange sounds and lighting in dark cave-shaped locations, and at the end the Jinn appear to amaze and terrify the audience. Audiences, who are affected by the time and space that the film creates, are waiting for a moment of astonishment. However, I do not think this is the right moment for that. At the beginning of the film we have no definition of bad and good, and the film does not even talk about the Jinn in order to focus the audience's attention on their

prior knowledge. This is just the opening of the film inviting the audience into a horror movie.

In the fifty-first minute, the audience are in the same place and seeing the same special effects but they now know about good and evil. Nevertheless, the special effects used in this scene are not something to be investigated for their special influence on the audience. This scene emphasises a belief in the dark magic powered by the Jinn. Despite the attitude of intellectuals to such matters, in Iranian political and social discourse the representation of dark magic in a film and discussions about Jinn are very important. However, I am simply looking for a part of the film where I can examine the theories that I mentioned earlier. Thus, I will only mention the digital special effects used to represent the Jinn and dark magic. This is the first time that Iranian cinema-goers have watched this part of their beliefs. Iranian audiences partially believe in the reality of the concepts of these creatures, although they know the picture is unreal. Therefore, the film affects people in two ways, firstly as something that amazes them (an effect that is not particularly strong due to the brevity of the scenes and the quality of visual effects) and secondly as a holy text that reveals something from religion to them. Thus, the film acts as religion for the Iranian audience, teaching them or reviving their religious knowledge about good and evil and encouraging them to support the good and avoid evil.



Figure 31: Zabulun under attack by the Jinn , 1:06:53 (before and after using visual effects)

In the scene of the Zabulun battle (sixty-sixth to seventy-seventh minute), we see a real battle between Jinn and humans representing evil and good. In the sixty-sixth minute, the audience sees the small, shiny small spheres as fairies that attract children; then smoke-shaped Jinn suddenly appear like flying monsters. They change their smoky shapes to become devils and so on, terrifying people and turning them into zombies, which is the second reason for the people's fear.

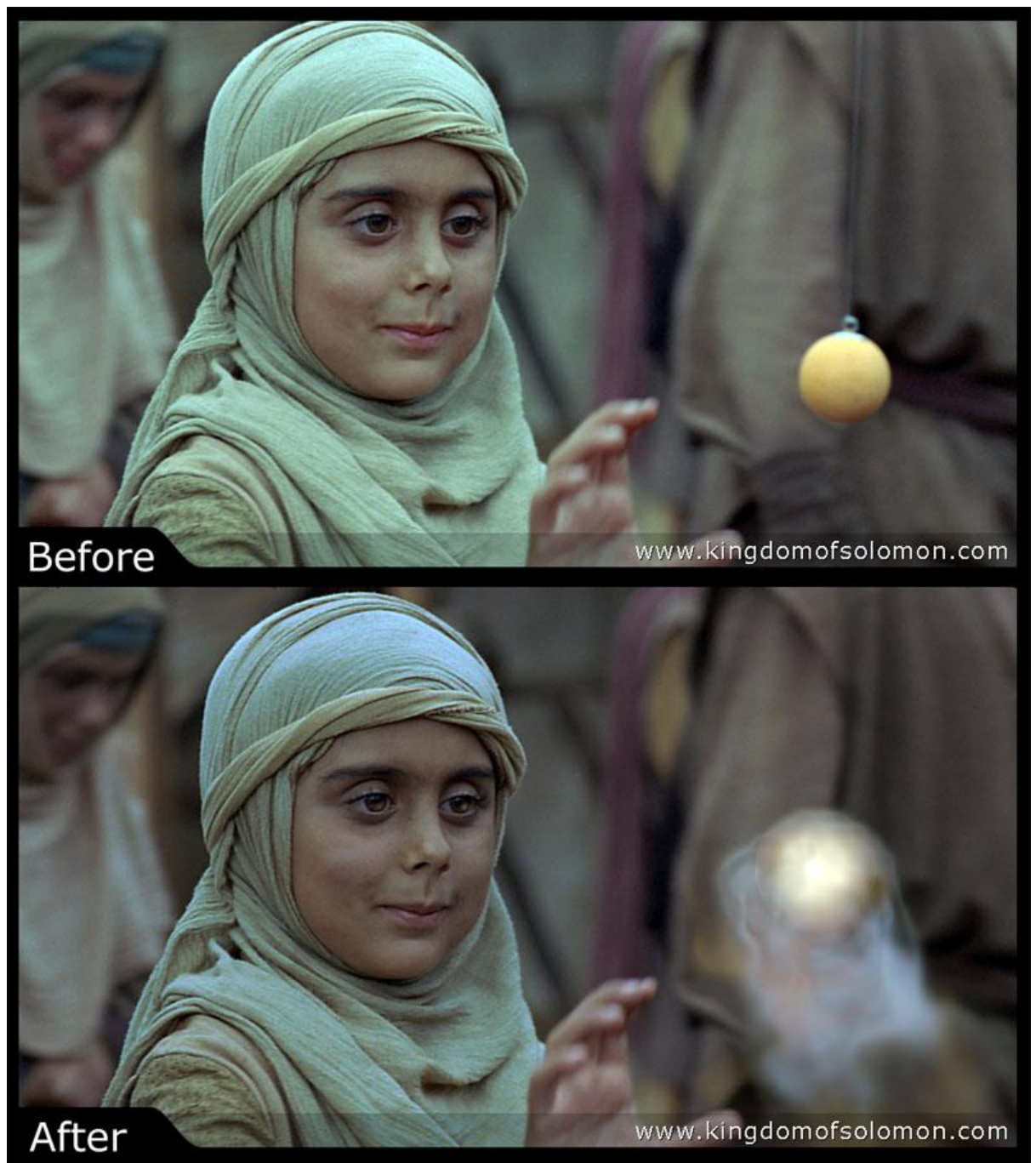


Figure 32: Zabulun before the Jinn Attack, 1:06:11 (applying visual effects for shining spheres)

In terms of special effects, the smoke-shaped monsters (Figure 30 and Figure 31) and shiny balls (Figure 32) are more elaborate than previous scenes because they appear in daylight and change their shape, roaming around and among the people. This scene is suitable for a discussion about the usage of digital special effects for intimating messages of the dominant ideology (in this case Islam). Although the shape of the monsters and atmosphere of the scene are not scary, the use of shiny spheres at the beginning of the scene prepares the audience for the next action. These balls are shining and attracting the



audience, drawing them into childish fantasies; then smoke-shaped monsters suddenly produce a horrific scene. Thus, digital special effects increase the sense of wonder in the audience. In other words, the audience, which is attracted to the shiny balls like fairies, momentarily forgets the dangerous situation of the town being attacked by monsters, and zombies roaming around killing people. Finally, the hero of the film, Solomon, exorcises the evil spirits. This creation of time and space is achieved only with the help of digital special effects. Thus, the dominant ideology speaks with the power of digital cinema, showing the people good and evil and demonstrating that the hero has special power to control everything and rescue the people with the help of God. In an interview, the director claims that some stars refused to take part in this project (Ostadi, 2010). Probably because the scenario obviously supports the government of Iran, even with its dialogue. The main story revolves around the need to obey the spiritual ruler and any disobedience is interpreted as *fetnah*, which was the most popular term for accusing the political opposition after 2009. Obviously, seeing the power of the hero is more effective than listening to his dialogue.

In the ninety-seventh minute, digital cinema represents the Jinn but they are changed from amorphous smoke to creatures like kangaroos. This is the end of the first episode of *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010), and for the Iranian audience brought up with stories about Jinn it is a moment of attraction because, although they may be familiar with smoke-shaped creatures from the *Lost* (2004-2010) TV series, they have never seen an Islamic Jinni. It is at that moment that the film acts as a religious descriptive text, showing a supernatural creature that amazes the audience to the extent of astonishment. On the other hand, the audience, who are aware that the pictures are fake and, at the same time, want to enjoy living the myth, experience a sort of dizziness similar to what we find in 'the cinema of attraction'. Nonetheless, they are dissatisfied because the Jinn are unclear and the film-maker does not focus on them. The director focuses on people who are affected by the Jinn and we only see the Jinn in very short scenes or long shots at night. Thus, this approach to representing the Jinn reduces the effectiveness of the scene but we can still recognise the last scene of this film as an example of the cinema of attraction. In addition, in the Islamic myth Solomon represents a leader who is supported

by God, and if some people and scholars question him, they do so because of evil and Satan. In this case the film acts as an impressive religious tool, as Wright (2007) argues.

### *Flying Ship*

The story of Solomon's flying carpet is one of the most famous mythical stories of ancient times. The representation of the flying gadget as a ship flying with the power of wind is interpreted from Islamic text to make this miracle more believable. This is an important example of myth being used to explain the endeavour of the film-maker to make a believable story. Myth, in general, implies a fantasy character and hero, but in Islamic knowledge all myths are real; they live and die on earth, and some of them will return to the material world. Therefore, film-makers who make films about Islamic myth, like scholars of theology, always try to justify the miracle and events as far as possible. Hence, for the Islamic film-maker and his audience, a flying ship is more realistic and believable than a flying carpet. In fact, in these scenes the audience is amazed by digital special effects but at the same time believes that this story happened once upon a time; thus, the audience, like a faithful Muslim who has read a religious text, believes in the events and messages of the film. This is the new religion mentioned earlier, and digital special effects empower it and make it more legible.

### *Light of Ali*

In the final scene of the film, we see another special effect that is not as complex but is undoubtedly meaningful. The concept of light is one of the most important concepts in Islamic theology. It is related to pantheism and the pre-existence of Islamic myth as well. Showing the light of Ilia (another name for Ali) draws the attention of a Shia audience to the great myth of Imam Ali; thus, regardless of the quality of digital special effects, when the light refers to Ilia the audience is affected by this scene and recalls these stories as Shiite stories. Solomon approaches the light, dissolves in it, and receives power from it. This is the moment when the myth of Solomon dissolves and becomes united with the myth of Ilia and the message of the film is confirmed in the heart of the faithful Shiite.

## *The Prospects of Digital Special Effects in Iranian Digital Cinema*

I will consider several points before focusing on predicting the situation of digital special effects based on *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010). First, the power of cinema is approved by the government in Iran and they are convinced of the effectiveness of exploiting cinema, especially in the realm of politics. Second, they are aware of the partial success of *The Kingdom of Solomon* in Iran but acknowledge its failure abroad. Third, the digital equipment required for digital special effects, such as scanners, printers and so on, is very expensive for the independent Iranian producer. Fourth, the financial problems of Iran may affect short-term cultural plans. These factors provide some evidence to help us determine the prospects of Iranian digital cinema.

Faravardeh (2012), the producer of *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010), claims that the budget for the film was around \$5million, with \$1million being spent on the special effects alone. He suggests that the film is quite economical, even in the context of Iranian cinema. However, critics believe that the money spent on special effects in this project has been wasted. Leo Lo, supervisor of the digital special effects, supervised 30 technicians in Iran and around 40 technicians in Hong Kong to develop this part of the film. But some parts of the project, such as making digital intermediate, were carried out entirely in Hong Kong. According to this kind of project management, some critics regarded the quality of the digital visual effects as poor and unacceptable.

The director, Bahrani, believes that this film, even before its exhibition, has had a big influence on Iranian film-makers and technicians. He believes it is the first experience of big-production digital cinema in Iran (Ostadi, 2010), and Faravardeh, the producer of the film, claims that it will facilitate this method of film-making in Iran in the future. He hopes that Iranian digital effects will develop further after the other episodes of *Kingdom of Solomon* that they plan to make (Faravardeh 2012). Some news reports support the claims of the producer regarding considerable returns from the Iranian box office. I should mention the figure of 3 billion and 100 million toman in box office takings by the film reported by the Mehr News Agency in 2010 (Jahannews, 2010).

Is it enough for the government to raise a budget for this kind of project or not? Apparently, the shooting of the second episode of *The Kingdom of Solomon* was halted because of this question. As Rezadad (2012), the previous head of Farabi Cinematic Foundation (governmental supporter of the film) claims, the government aimed to increase its international prosperity by spending time and money on this project. However, it was unable to attract international interest artistically or financially. Logically, the Iranian regime is able to produce many films and series with a TV budget and achieve the same result and influence. *The Kingdom of Solomon* followed the Chinese method of film-making that resulted in a number of Chinese international blockbusters such as *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). However, this method does not entirely work in Iran, even with the help of the Chinese because most prominent Iranian cineastes do not want to participate in these kinds of movies that are supported by the government. . As Farvardeh, (2012) believes in case of *Kingdom of Solomon*, these cineastes are reluctant to contribute to these movies because they do not want to support the government ideology. On the other hand, famous actors do not want to engage in a long-term project that will take several years to complete instead of several small and low-budget projects since those low-budget projects keep them in the public eye and sometimes enjoy more international success than the governmental big-budget projects.

As Faravardeh (2012) claimed in his recent interview in March 2012 (two years after the exhibition of the film), *The Kingdom of Solomon* has had an influence on Iranian cinema directly and indirectly, specifically the technology of producing high-quality 'green screen' in Iran and the promotion of several films using it as part of their production. Co-operation in digital special effects (Iran and abroad) has been repeated in the new big-budget project *Mohamed* by Majid Majidi. According to Rezadad (2012), the executive producer of this project, the digital special effects for this film are being managed by Scott E. Anderson, who supervised the visuals for *Terminator 2* (1991) and *King Kong* (2005). Anderson claims: "I believe a movie like *Mohammad* changes the cinema industry of a country" (Moazezinia 2011). The first studio for digital intermediate (DI) processes in Iran has been established by the Kamrani Foundation which facilitates the use of visual effects in Iranian cinema.



The future of digital cinema in terms of blockbusters and big-budget films in Iran is not clear, unless the digital special effects become cheaper and more accessible. I personally assume that this is possible because technology has changed from home hi 8 camcorders to full HD professional quality cameras in a few years.

In conclusion, Iranian digital visual effects (or digital special effects) are the last part of digital cinema introduced in the context of Iranian cinema. As we mention in the section on 'religion and cinema', the Iranian Islamic revolutionary regime, despite initially banning cinemas, has established and supported the new Iranian cinema to introduce and support its ideas (Wright, 2007). The dominant religious ideology in the Iranian cinematic context plays a significant role in managing and leading mainstream Iranian films and big-production projects on the one hand and affecting independent films indirectly on the other hand. Iranian digital special effects are considered a part of big-production movies that are usually supported and controlled by the government to reinforce the dominant ideology through the messages that these films offer through their narratives as well as their visual attraction created by the digital visual effects they use. *The Kingdom of Solomon* (2010) is a unique case that I have chosen for its characteristics in this respect. The film was supported by the government and uses a vast range of digital special effects in its production. I argued that these digital special effects reinforce the Iranian dominant ideology in several ways. First they show myths and events (such as miracles of the ancient prophet, Solomon) that empower or rehabilitate the beliefs of ordinary people. Moreover, we cannot deny the role of "the cinema of attraction" in encouraging people to see this film due to its use of digital special effects. Second, the film is capable of amazing people and delivering special and mystical messages to the heart of the audience, as we have discussed previously in the role of astonishment in Islamic mysticism. *The Kingdom of Solomon* uses the technology of visual effects with the help of the Chinese technician Leo Lo to achieve this goal. To amaze the audience, the digital special effects were used to add realism to events and creatures such as a flying ship, Jinn and others. Third, based on what we have explained according to Soroush (1992), the film can accustom audiences to amazement and prepare them for the astonishment

process, which is the aim of the dominant ideology: to create minds that are ready to accept supernatural objects and events and holy orders.

Iranian digital special effects have begun to reach this ultimate goal compared to what we have observed in Hollywood blockbusters and the daily development of digital technology. However, *The Kingdom of Solomon* may be a milestone of Iranian digital cinema in terms of further progress.

## Conclusion

'The Emergence and Development of Digital Filmmaking in Iran' presents a new perspective on Iranian cinema based on digital cinema theories. It describes an emerging film-making in Iran which affects Iranian cinema as a context and also affects World Cinema in the case of digital Iranian neorealism by presenting a distinctive method of film-making, based on its cinematic roots and culture. It also presents a new potential relationship between digital special effect and religious ideology.

As the Iranian cinema is deep-rooted and has different aspects, this research adopts different methods and theories to explore the different aspects of digital cinema in Iran. In general the research provides a comprehensive view of Iranian digital film-making and offers a new approach to Iranian cinema based on new media theories. In fact, in general, we should consider Iranian cinema as a cinema supervised by government but in some aspects, it has its own independent products. Thus it opens up different realm of the digital cinema for research. I investigated the Iranian digital cinema as an emerging phenomenon in its cinematic context (in chapter two). I then investigated two aspects of this phenomenon in other chapters to show the extent to which the digital film-making has influenced different features of Iranian cinema. One of these two aspects is the representation of reality, which is discussed in the third chapter, while the second is usage of digital special effects, which I investigated in the fourth chapter. In the case of the representation of reality, I focused on Iranian neorealist film-makers and showed how digital cinema in general and small mobile cameras, with their cheap digital tapes and material, in particular encourage Iranian film-makers to take a closer look at reality and capture more scenes from the real world within their work, be it through the natural behaviour of an actor or the choice of a real event as the background of a scene. In the case of digital special effects, I focus on Iranian big-budget films and argue that digital special effects make the old expensive technology of special effects much more accessible and cheaper, thus encouraging the government to support cinematic projects that enforce the myths and beliefs of the dominant ideology.

I used the work of Manovich (2001) as well as other theories such as that of Bolter and Grusin (2002) in this new cinema to find a frame-work and then adopt an empirical study by using interviews and film analysis to investigate and

show the trend towards digitalisation of Iranian cinema in different aspects: from the adoption of certain artistic techniques in cinematography to the use of certain devices in editing, and from changes in cinematic guilds to new interest in digital visual effects. I showed how the dominance of “computer culture” in this new technology has affected the hierarchy of certain cinematic guilds, such as editors, sound designers and cinematographers, by introducing large numbers of poorly-skilled technicians to these guilds. These changes and the resistance of traditional technicians have produced a certain speed and acceleration in the trend towards digitalisation of the Iranian cinema. I not only examined the reaction of film-makers and technicians in filming and post-production to the conventions of the new media, but also investigated some factors in traditional Iranian cinema which provide a basis for this new technology. To do so, I investigated short films and documentaries in Iran and I showed the extent to which Iranian cinema was expecting and awaiting this revolution. With reference to the interviews I conducted, I argued that the idea of freedom from capital and censorship was rooted in Iranian cinema by the short films and documentaries supported by organisations such as Youth Cinema, and film-makers were simply looking for the right technology to express themselves and free themselves from the domination of capital and government; thus, they embraced the digital devices. I also explained that the resistance of some technicians to the adoption of the new technology is mostly due to the incomplete nature of the devices that were introduced to Iran in the early 2000s. I also briefly explained the facilities that digital technology has recently brought to Iran in terms of digital exhibition in cinemas and the freedom gained by some independent film-makers through digital black market distribution as this affects digital film-making. In fact, this research aimed to recognise and describe Iranian digital film-making and distinguish its characteristics.

I used information obtained from my interviews and analysis of films, as well as digital media theories and film theories, to investigate digital film-making in Iran. This investigation explores the roots of digital film-making in Iran, which dates back to the pre-digital era, and the changes in dependent and independent film-making. It also sheds light on the prospects of digital film-making in Iran in terms of digital special effects and big-budget projects. Although I described the

emergence of digital film-making and traced the trajectory of this phenomenon in Iranian cinema since the 1990s, I focused on the films made in 'Iranian art house' cinema to answer the research question about the representation of reality in this new method of film-making among Iranian neorealist film-makers. I described digital post-revolutionary Iranian neorealist cinema based on Naficy's (2012) idea about 'art house cinema' and then used the methods and ideas of film-makers such as Kiarostami and film theorists such as Bazin to analyse the digital films.

I focused on certain aspects of digital films such as script, lighting, camera and location to analyse and demonstrate the difference between analogue and digital film in approaching the real world and creating cinematic reality. I compared these factors with the analogue films of the same directors to show the precise effects of digital cinema when there are several factors in common. Finally, I compared works of Kiarostami, Panahi and Ghobadi to show the common influence of digital cinema on the Iranian cinematic context and to determine the characteristics of this kind of film-making. Consequently, I presented an Iranian style of digital film that carries some specifications of Iranian neorealism before digitalisation, in addition to some characteristics that emerge as a result of digital thought and devices. After analysing the films before and after digitalisation, I argued that digital films have a closer approach to the real world, and film-makers have achieved closer interaction with the real world as well. This is sometimes seen just in the direction or the stimulation of non-professional actors or the use of natural available light. In fact, in both digital and analogue film-making, we see the tendency to use real locations, non-professional actors, and realistic lighting as characteristics of Iranian neorealism. However, according to my film analysis and the interviews that I and other scholars conducted with film-makers, I argued that the acting of non-professional actors in digital works may be more natural due to the elimination of the factors that disturb them, and the interaction of the camera (in terms of movement and angle) with small, crowded locations is more flexible and thus achieves a closer look at the real world.

On other words, the main focus of this research was on Iranian neorealist cinema and the changing characteristics of this cinema caused by the use of digital devices. Referring to Naficy's (2012) notion of Iranian neorealism, I

focused on Kiarostami and his disciples who shaped Iranian neorealism after the Islamic revolution. I analysed and compared the works of Kiarostami, Panahi and Ghobadi to extract the characteristics of this kind of realism after digitalisation. I identified these major changes in this new kind of film-making as follows:

- Urban subjects in general and complex urban subjects in particular have become more common in these films. I used the term 'complex subject' to describe subjects that deal with current social problems of urban people and demonstrate different social classes more deeply.
- The tendency to have open and half-written scripts has increased in order to use more of the real world (as a documentary part) in a drama.
- Although the usage of real locations was a characteristic of this kind of cinema before digitalisation, the usage of crowded real locations and real small locations seems more convenient in digital film-making.
- The actors achieve more natural and believable performances.
- The interaction between the camera (movement and angles) and real locations has increased in order to produce more realistic films.
- The usage of natural and available light has become more important.
- Directors adopt closer interaction with the real world based on their own methods.

Most of these changes are the consequences of small digital cameras but there are some particular specifications, such as modularity, in some digital works in Iranian neorealism that match Manovich's (2001) notion of new digital media; we mentioned these in the case of Kiarostami's digital works and also in the films of his disciples who follow that method. In particular, in the case of *Ten* I investigated a film that can be divided into modules, each of which can stand alone in terms of its meaning in the absence of other modules. I also showed that the assembled modules can deliver a message by standing together.

Visual digital effects are the final part of digital film-making to have been developed in the Iranian cinematic context and examined in this research. I

examined the capability of this new phenomenon to support religious ideology, myth and beliefs, to draw a perspective of the future of this new technology in Iranian cinema. I examined Bolter and Grusin's (2002) notion of the 'cinema of attraction' of Gunning (1995) as well as other theories in the realm of 'religion and cinema' in the case of *Kingdom of Solomon* to show the extent to which the dominant religious ideology might use digital film-making in order to confirm this domination. I argued that the big budget films that use digital special effects to create Islamic stories can affect the audience in several ways. First, they materialise myths and events by using virtual reality, which can empower or rehabilitate the beliefs of ordinary people. Second, the films can amaze people in two ways; skilful visual effects may momentarily amaze naive audiences because of digital cinema's immediacy, or they amaze because of the dizziness between immediacy and awareness of the sense, as Bolter and Grusin (2002) suggest. Thus, the special and mystical messages delivered to the heart of the audience refer to the idea of astonishment in Islamic mysticism. Third, based on what we have explained from the work of Soroush (1992), they can cause audiences to become accustomed to amazement and ready for the astonishment process, which is the aim of the dominant ideology: the mind that is ready to accept supernatural objects and events and holy orders. Therefore, digital cinema in terms of visual effects can be developed in the shadow of governmental support in Iran, as we can see in recent big budget projects such as *Muhamad* (2015).

To sum up, Iranian digital film-making, which has emerged and developed since 2000 in the Iranian cinematic context, mainly follows a trend based on the nature of new media. However, based on my research, I argued that this trend is subject to fluctuation because of Iranian cinema's specification. In addition, due to the realistic cinematic culture of Iran and the presence of Iranian neorealism film-makers, we face the emergence of a new kind of film making which has certain international effects in world cinema. I argued that these film makers have found a new method to approach reality and represent it in their films. On the other hand, this new cinematic reality had more elements from the real world than the analogue one, due to the power of digital cameras and technology. Moreover, the special interest shown by the Iranian government in digital special effects has opened up the possibility of a new kind of big budget



film in Iran with the usage of digital special effects and CGI, which has its own aim and messages. In this regard, I found and presented a new relationship between digital special effects and Iranian religious ideology. In fact, I argued that we face a new film-making being born in the old traditional Iranian cinema which respects this analogue heritage but has a stronger bond with reality in the case of neorealism 'art house cinema' and is more attention-grabbing in the case of big budget films.

Iranian digital film-making does not stand alone; as a matter of fact it is part of Iranian cinema which has developed in Iran and been inspired by both a rich Iranian art and an Iranian 'neorealist' film tradition. Digital devices help digital filmmakers to build a closer bond with reality and satisfy their desire to produce realistic and truthful films. Digital technology also pushes the government-backed artist to apply this new technology in the production of religious films which might confirm myths and beliefs of religious people. In fact, digital technology has empowered and encouraged different parts of Iranian cinema to develop and achieve the goals they had long aimed for, but could not achieve during the analogue era.

I briefly investigated all aspects of Iranian cinema which are affected by digital technology in the second chapter; this can be an opening for further research into aspects such as digital documentaries, which have strong connections with politics and society. Furthermore digital distribution and exhibition will continue to have an influence on Iranian digital cinema and may affect government policy; this might also be an interesting research topic in terms of cultural studies. In fact, the second chapter provides a reliable basis for any future research into the digitalisation of Iranian art, media and in particular cinema. In terms of digital special effects, *Muhamad* (2015), the new film directed by Majid Majidi would be a good case-study for research into the representation of religion with the help of digital visual effects in Iran and it may provide new findings and illuminate new experience in Iran in this regard.

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- Dehghani, Bahram. 2012, Interviewed by Razazifar, A.
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- Mostafavi, Youssef. 2012, Interviewed by Razazifar A.

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## Filmography

*10 + 4* (2007), Mania Akbari, [Iran]

*10 on Ten* (2004), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*20 Fingers/ Bist Angosht* (2004), Mani Akbari, Iran

*33 Days/ 33 Rooz* (2012), Jamal Shoorjeh, Iran

*Abadan* (2004), Mani Haghighi, Iran

*ABC Africa* (2001), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Abyss* (1989), James Cameron, USA

*Afghan Alphabet/ Alefbaye Afghan* (2001), Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran

*An American Werewolf in Paris* (1997), Anthony Waller, USA

*Ashkan, The Charmed Ring and Other Storie* (2009), Shahram Mokri, Iran

*Barefoot to Harat* (2002), Majid Majidi, Iran

*Benny's Video* (1992), Michael Haneke, Austria

*Born Under Libra/ Motevalede Mah Mehr* (2001), Ahmad Reza Darvish, Iran

*Boutique* (2003), Hamid Nematollah, Iran

*First Case, Second Case* (1979), Abbas Kirostami, Iran

*Certified Copy* (2010), Abbas Kiarostami, Italy

*Close Up* (1990), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Cow/ Gav* (1969), Daryoush Mehrjooei, Iran

*Crimson Gold/ Talaye Sorkh* (2003), Jafar Pnahi, Iran

*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000), Ang Lee, China

*Dehnamakihaa* (2008), Pegah Ahangarani, Iran

*Eshghe Film* (2011), Ebrahim Vahidzadeh, Iran

*Family Viewing* (1987), Atom Egoyan, Canada

*Farewell Baghdad/ Bedrood Baghdad* (2010), Mehdi Naderi, Iran

*Fat Shaker/ Larzanande Charbi* (2013), Moamhamad Shirvani, Iran

*Festen* (1998), Thomas Vinterberg, Denmark

*Fish and Cat Mahi Va Gorbah* (2013), Shahram Mokri, Iran

*Five Dedicated to Ozu* (2003), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Five in the Afternoon* (2003), Samira Makhmalbaf, Afghanistan

*Gardener* (2012), Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Israeli

*Goodbye/ Be Omide Didar* (2011), Mohammad Rasoulouf, Iran

*Green Days* (2009), Hana Makhmalbaf, Iran

*Half Moon/ Nive Mang* (2006), Bahman Ghobadi, Iran

*Homework/ Mashghe shab* (1989), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*House of Flying Daggers* (2004), Yimou Zhang, China

*Joy of Madness* (2003), Hanna Makhmalbaf, Afghanistan

*Jurassic Park* (1993), Steven Spielberg, USA

*Keshti-e Nooh* (2012), Soodabeh Babagari, Iran

*King Kong* (2005), Peter Jackson, Iran

*Kingdom of Solomon/ Molke Soleyman* (2010), Sharyar Bahrani, Iran

*Leily Ba Man Ast* (1996), Kamal Tabrizi, Iran

*Life and Nothing More/ Zendegi Va Digar Hich* (1992), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Like Someone in Love* (2012), Abbas Kiarostami, Japan

*Loneliness of Mourning Play Actor/ Tanhaei Yek Shabih Khan* (2001), Alireza Razazifar, Iran

*Lonely Tune of Tehran/ Tarane Tanhaei Tehran* (2008), Saman Saloor, Iran

*Lost* (2004-2010), J.J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, Damon Lindelof, USA

*Mainline/ Khoonbazi* (2006), Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Iran

*Majnoone Leyli* (2008), Ghasem Jafari, Iran

*Man Zamin Raa Doost Daram* (1993), Abolhasan Davoudi, Iran

*Manuscripts Don't Burn/ Dastneveshteha Nemisoozand* (2013) Mohammad Rasoulouf, Iran

*Maritime Silk Road/ Rah Abrisham Abi* (2011), Mohamad Bozorgnia, Iran

*MAXX* (2005), Saman Moghadam, Iran

*Men at Work/ Kargaran Mashghole Karand* (2006), Mani Haghighi, Iran

*Mohakemeh* (1999), Hasan Hedayat, Iran

*Moje Morde* (2001), Ebrahim Hatamikia, Iran

*Navel/ Naf* (2004), Moamhamad Shirvani, Iran

*Night Bus/ Otobuse Shab* (2007), Kiumars Poorahmad, Iran

*Night on Earth* (1991), Jim Jarmusch, USA

*No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009), Bahman Gobadi, Iran

*O.K .Mister* (1978), Masoud Kimiavi, Iran

*Offside* (2006) Jafar Panahi, Iran

*One Night/ Yek Shab* (2005), Niki Karimi, Iran

*Our Time/ Roozgar Ma* (2002), Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Iran

*Paranormal Activity* (2007), Oren Peli, USA

*Parvaneha Badraghe Mikonanad* (2002), Mohamad Ebrahim Moayeri, Iran

*Poverty and Prostitution/ Faghr Va Fahsha* (2005), Masoud Dehnamaki, Iran

*Quarantine* (2008), John Erick Dowdle, USA

*Report/ Gozaresh* (1977), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Rhino Season/ Fasle Kargadan* (2012), Bahman Ghobadi, Turkey

*Saaghi* (2001), Mohamdreza Alami, Iran

*Salaam Cinema* (1995), Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran

*Sarboland* (2006), Saeid Tehrani, Iran

*Shirin* (2008), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Shouting in Darkness* (2011), May Ying Welsh, Qatar

*Slum Dog Millionaire* (2008), Danny Boyle, USA

*Star Wars* (1977-1983), George Lucas, USA

*Tahrir* (2011), Stefano Savona, Egypt

*Tall Shadow of Wind Sayehaye Bolande Bad* (1978), Bahman Farmanara, Iran

*Taste of Cherry/ Tame Gilas* (1997), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Ten* (2002), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Tenancy/ Ejareneshini* (1980), Ebrahim Mokhtari, Iran

*Terminator2* (1991), James Cameron, USA

*Testing Democracy/ Teste Democracy* (2000), Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran

*The Circle /Dayere* (2000), Jafar Pnahi, Iran

*The Green Waves* (2010), Ali Ahadi Samadi, Iran

*The House Is Black/ Khane Siah Ast* (1962), Forough Farokhzad, Iran

*The Idiots* (1998), Lars Von Trier, Denmark

*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2011), Peter Jackson, USA

*The Matrix* (1999), Andy Wachowski, USA

*The May Lady/ Banooye Ordibehesht* (1999), Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Iran

*The White Meadow Keshtzarhaye Sepid* (2009), Mohammad Rasoulof, Iran

*The Wind Will Carry Us/ Baad Ma Ra Khahad Bord* (1999), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Thirteen Cats on the Roof/ Sizdah gorbe Rooye Shirvani* (2003), Ali Abdulalizadeh, Iran

*This Is Not a Film/ In Yek Film Nist* (2012), Jafar Pnahi, Iran

*Through the Olive Trees/ Zire Derakhtane Zeytoon* (1994), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Tickets* (2005), Abbas Kiarostami, Ken Loach, Ermanno Olmi, Italy

*Where is the Friend's Home?/ Khnae Doost Kojast?* (1987), Abbas Kiarostami, Iran

*Willow Tree/ Bide Majnoon* (2005), Majid Majidi, Iran

## Appendix

## *Main Interview Questions*

### Cinematographers

- 1- In which conditions and circumstances do you prefer using digital cameras?
- 2- How many kinds of digital cameras have you worked with? Name them (also name the film and director) and briefly describe your attitude to them.
- 3- Do you believe that digital cameras make cinematography simpler? Do you think digital cameras have increased the number of cinematographers?

### Governmental Managers

- 1- What is digital cinema?
- 2- When was digital cinema introduced in Iran?
- 3- What are the consequences of introducing digital cinema in Iran?
- 4- What are the consequences of digital camcorders and digital editing in Iran?
- 5- What do you do for or against digital cinema (or parts of it such as digital cameras)?
- 6- Do you believe in the emergence of a new generation of film-makers as a result of digital devices?
- 7- When did the government start to equip cinemas with surround sound?

## Sound Engineers

- 1- When and how did digital sound recording begin in Iran? Did it change anything dramatically?

## Sound Editors

- 1- When and how did digital sound editing begin in Iran?
- 2- Do you like the digital editing software and do you prefer it to previous methods? Why?
- 3- Do you think it is causing chaos in your profession by introducing amateurs who are taking the place of professionals?
- 4- Did you like digital sound editing at the beginning and welcome it?

## Editors

- 1- Describe the change in editing when digital editing was introduced in Iran.
- 2- Does digital editing put your proficiency in danger as an expert editor who has worked with traditional Movielle?
- 3- What kind of digital software is more convenient for you over time?
- 4- What was the first editing software that you were aware of and when did you find it as a user?

## Directors

- 1- What is your attitude to digital cinema? (please mention your views on digital cameras, mini digital cameras, and editing and digital formats for distribution through the Internet or DVD)
- 2- Why did you choose a digital camera for your film?



- 3- Do you honestly trust digital cameras artistically?
- 4- What do digital devices contribute to film-making, innovatively, artistically or financially?
- 5- What are your views on using stars or professional actresses when you work with a digital camera?
- 6- Do you think there is an emerging new generation of film-makers due to digital devices?

#### Producers

- 1- What were the first digital devices that you used in your company?
- 2- What digital devices are you provided with to make a film financially?

#### Documentary Film-makers Society & Short Film Society

- 1- To what extent does digital cinema make you a film-maker?  
Or to what extent does digital cinema make them film-makers?

#### Visual Effects Supervisors

- 1- Please explain the history of digital visual effects in Iran.

#### Merchants (Trading Technology)

- 1- When did you sell your first digital camera? What was it? Who bought it?
- 2- When did the digital camera become popular, which type was most popular and which ones were bought by professionals?
- 3- When did you sell your first digital editing software?

- 4- Which digital editing software and hardware is most popular? What about among professionals?

## *Interviews*

**Ahmadi, A. Board manager of digital company, pioneer in trading digital editing software and hardware in Iran. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 20/09/2012**

AR: When did you sell your first editing board and digital editing software?

AA: The first one was PAR, belonging to DPS, a Canadian company; we imported it in 1375 but there were a few of them before that time. Matrox has been imported since 1377.

RA: Which digital editing software and hardware is most popular? What about among professionals?

AA: Professional cinema did not use these. Of course there have been some boards belonging to Pinnacle Company since 1376. Before us, there was no official importing of these editing boards. I think the first PAR was imported to Iran in 1373 but it was very rare. Since 1377 people who made videos for wedding ceremonies liked these and gradually IRIB used non-linear editing. PAR was not real-time. Then in 1376 Perception came to Iran. That was a real-time editing board and then Pinnacle introduced its real-time editing card.

**Arab, Mohamdreza. Pioneer digital film-maker. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 22/08/2012**

AR: What is your attitude to digital cinema?

MA: I think the first digital camera in Iran was the DSR200, which I worked with. I was working on a documentary about the Kosovo crisis. I had used 8 and Hi-8 camcorders, which were not professional enough for documentaries. They were kind of home cameras. I worked with Bata-Cam in my documentary about caves. But it slowed down the work. I heard about a light small camera for my

documentary on Kosovo. But it had a black-and-white monitor and you had to know the principles of cinematography. I think someone else also bought this camera and Abbas Tahvildari bought its player. I made the rest of the *Iranian Caves* documentary series with that camera. We used a Beta-Cam copy and analogue linear editing in post-production. I think Yosef Mostafavi imported it and Mohamad Alatpoush recommended it to us. Then the PD150 was imported followed by the DSR250, which is a mixture of those two. That was Sony policy for the market. I have worked with most cameras since 1360. We always suffered from sanctions and trafficking via Persian Gulf countries. They threw tapes in the sea for trafficking. Anyway, the introduction of digital cinema was inevitable.

AR: What about problems?

MA: Contrast of video was low and we suffered from lack of good contrast. Film laboratories co-operated with digital production. So, for titles and credits you give them a file. I think digital and film do not dominate each other. They will sync together.

**Aslani, Tooraj. DOP, pioneer of digital cinematography. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 16/03/2012**

AR: In which conditions and circumstances do you prefer using digital cameras?

TA: Each script has its own tool. If we know the director's specifications we can select the tools. Some people select tools just for behind-the-scenes photos. The value of a frame for us is high because we started from photography. I think digital cinema began with this misunderstanding: "let's film and see what happens".

My first work was *Khabe Sefid* directed by Hamid Jebeli. I used (negative) Fuji 500 in winter. I used it for interior and exterior scenes. But Mr Kalari supported me. I experienced working with 500 and its ability. This was before the introduction of digital. I used the negative, which changes normal attitudes to exposing. Had there been digital at that time, I would have looked differently at that film.

AR: How many kinds of digital camera have you worked with? Name them (also name the film and director) and briefly describe your attitude to them.

TA: My first digital work was *Parvaneha Badraghe Mikonanad* directed by Mohammad Ebrahim Moayeri in 1379. The Canon XL1 had very good optical specifications and it has a cinematic texture in terms of frame rate. This means it has 25 frames per second progressive. We converted it to digital at Filmsaz Studio using a primitive method. This was after *Moje Morde* but it was closer to cinema in terms of visuals. This gave me an idea that we could use this in independent film. I used negative Kodak 500 in *Danehayeh Rize Barf* directed by Alireza Amini. The whole story was in a coal mine. The location did not allow us to use light. So we worked without light by using chemical work in the laboratory but Red Epic exists today.

The next film was *Navare Khali Khaterat Tehran* which was digital. I made it with a Canon XL1 in 2003. I filmed *Bist Angosht* with XL1S. It won the best digital film in Venice Film Festival in 2004 which was the first year that the festival offered this award. It was just 8 shots. We had a 13-minute shot so we had to use digital. It was handheld.

I used a Canon HL1 (full HD) in *Tarane Tanhaei Tehran* directed by Saman Salur in 2008. It was in the Directors Fortnight section. We transferred it to 2K and it exhibited in this format. When I saw the result of my cinematography for *Lonely Tune of Tehran* in Cannes Film Festival 2008, my entire bond with 35mm camera was broken. Some Iranian experts such as Shoja Noori thought it was filmed with 35mm. The 35 mm camera in Iranian cinema is a bulky device which belongs to industrial cinema, and we do not have industrial cinema. Usage of 35mm camera is like buying a cow for drinking a cup of milk. They convert 35mm to digital intermediate abroad. Then, after working with it, they convert it back to 35mm. But they are producers of industrial cinema.

Independent cinema means independent beliefs. I do not think it has to be a low-budget cinema. We wanted to make a film that was written by Makhmalbaf and might have been directed by Mirtahmasb three years before *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. It was about the Tehran earthquake. I wanted Red but the producer proposed Z1. We did a test. We should have shown Tehran empty. We could not make it.

AR: Let's focus on *Persian Cats*:

TA: It was filmed with a "Silicon Image 2K" camera. Ghobadi wanted to have seven music videos by Tehran's musicians. I thought, using 35mm as well as digital with low quality is not sufficient for this purpose. SI2K was bought from Munich and I attended a workshop in Dubai on how to use it. It was the first film in Iranian digital cinema that had 2K quality."

In terms of light design, my light source is in the frame but no one recognises it because of the scene, and the audience accept it as the taste of characters for lighting their places. I do not use any light in the back stage; all my light sources are in the frame. For example, as a character was using some stuff to make his underground acoustic, so he used a kind of lighting in his own studio, such as using halogen near 100 w lamps. This kind of lighting is designed based on the character's taste of lighting.

I separated the body from the optical part in order to make it more portable for filming in different locations (on motorcycles, in cars and small places). And we connected them to each other with cable. This is because I like to film in real locations.

Respecting technicians and artists and avoiding clichés, I left 35mm cinema behind for digital camera. It is safer and gives me the chance of being more real and artistic.

I used six cinematic lenses for music videos and took the whole story in the city [dramatic part] and city atmosphere with one lens, 9.5mm super 16. The dramatic part was done with one lens and the fantasy part was done with several cinematic lenses.

As for gates, I used 1/2/35 for the dramatic part and full frame for the city atmosphere in order to use part of it when I transfer it to 35mm. This is a special use of digital camera for me. In 35mm, if you use a gate you should use it for the whole film.

In realistic cinema the eye is important for me. What you can see with the eye is real. So ASA is important for me. In realistic cinema I should avoid artificial light and I should connect with architecture for lighting.

AR: What did you do after *Persian Cats*?

TA: I worked on *San Petersburg* directed by Behrooz Afkhami, *Bedrood Baghdad* directed by Mehdi Nazeri and *Soute Payan* directed by Niki Karimi. I was using this quality.

Digital Cinema saves technicians' lives and equipment. When I used a Tower Crane with remote control, I saved the lives of people (artists and technicians). A lot of cinematographers were injured by faulty cranes. Respecting the cinema crew, I keep my distance from 35mm. It is dangerous and full of clichés. If you do not want to avoid clichés, you must do dangerous work, such as using car-mount and Filmro in Iran. Having strange decoupage means danger in 35mm.

Although the interest in 35mm is decreasing day by day, celluloid is still used for assessing standard quality. So I don't think 35mm has diminished but it is not good for our native film-making.

*San Petersburg* is a commercial film this was filmed using this camera. Maybe just ten per cent of its decoupage was not sufficient for 35mm. But I preferred it because it gave us a chance of better colour grading. Of course, the director liked to work with digital. He made a TV drama with an HD camera before that.

*Bedrood Baghdad* is the story of the US Army in Iraq. An American boxer who comes to Iraq after failing in his sport meets a suicide boomer who regrets his actions. In order to do it, we thought we would have to go to the USA and Iraq but we made it here around Tehran. Digital is good for faking locations and changing colour. We worked in Shahrake Defae Moghadas for 50 minutes of film. We changed the colour of the soil. Or, for example, a scorpion stings a soldier and I had to travel with that scorpion. This is very dangerous with a 35mm camera. I attached a camera optical part to a boom and put a mirror on it. The scorpion looked at its image in the camera and came towards it. I used over-lighting of the background for the boxing ring scene. Apart from that scene, I used natural lighting.

In *Soute Payan*, the camera was hand-held on the Tehran allies. We went with the actors and did not control their movements. We believed in real locations.

In *Fasle Kargadan* we worked with a Canon 5D-2. It was the first film to be made entirely by photographic camera and we made it in Turkey. One of the specifications of this camera is its frame size. Each frame is 36x24mm. This means each frame is 2 and 1/3 of cinematic frame. The size of the frame gives us the chance to have better density and better colour when we transfer the film to 35mm. Ghobadi is among those directors with an interest in new devices. He has just made his first film with Iranian cameras. We used 35mm lenses designed by Zeiss in *Fasle Kargadan*. It was a good experience in terms of lighting. I used LED and finger lights, which was good for this camera. *Fasle Kargadan* does not have any hand-held shots.

*Boghaz* directed by Reza Dormishan is another Iranian film made in Turkey. I worked with two cameras simultaneously in that film. I used photography lenses which had problems in focusing and I used them to present characters who are drug addicts. I worked with 5D and natural lighting.

You should not look for 35 mm camera in digital cameras. Your lighting is for digital not for 35mm.

AR: Do you believe that digital cameras make cinematography simpler? Do you think digital cameras have increased the number of cinematographers?

TA: The invasion of amateurs is not dangerous. You can find flowers in grass. Digital cinema deceives everyone. Digital needs different decoupage. In *Navare Khali Khaterate Tehran*, the camera was located in a box and the characters and I threw it against the wall, so digital camera worked there. It is story of a husband and wife who buy a handy-cam and go on a journey. They fight with each other during the journey and the camera is the film's camera.

I have principles for lighting, as the location architecture, characters and their tastes are very important. Architecture defines lighting for me. If the film is a normal film, the ASA is important. But in real and social cinema, the eye is very important for me. In fiction I made atmosphere with light. In social cinema light is important for me and in Avant-Garde cinema equipment is more important. Equipment helps to give different views. In realistic cinema I would avoid artificial light and I would connect with architecture for lighting.

If you can say that a handmade carpet is useless, you can say that a 35mm camera is useless too.

**Bashirzadeh, M. Board manager of a digital equipment company.  
Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 14/03/2012**

AR: What was the first digital camera to be introduced to Iran?

B: In terms of professional digital videos, the Sorous company (IRIB) presented and introduced the Sony DSR135 to Iran and they sold them to private companies and film offices by using Note-3 governmental loans. The films were copied to Beta-Cam after recording. Two years ago, broadcasting went completely digital in IRIB. Beta-Cam was replaced by the Sony XD-Cam (EX1 and EX3) two years ago. They introduced some Panasonic and JVC cameras as well but Sony has more influence in IRIB.

AR: What about new technical changes in cinema?

MB: The look and quality of SI2K is close to 35mm film although its sensor is close to 16mm film. So, around ten cinematic feature films used that camera and recorded them on 35mm film.

AR: What about changes, who used these kinds of cameras?

MB: As these new cameras were introduced, the guys who worked for video came to work with them in cinema but without a monitor they could not work because being a real cinematographer is very hard. The right process was missed. A lot of camera operators came for cinematography.

AR: What is the problem?

MB: Wrong conditions, no one cares about quality and it is IRIB's fault. Also, we do not have a digital culture. I mean we do not know how to record for a good result. When Alexa came, they said: "OK, we record with this, we do not need anything." They think primitively. They do not care about lighting. The Sony D5 was introduced. It was just 2500\$. But you must spend more money to achieve good results with these kinds of cameras. But they think Hollywood works with this method. For example, they used one SI2K and two 5D together,



filming with three cameras, and they struggle to match the colour in post-production. When DV was introduced we had problems in Chroma Key. Then progressive came, but we did something else. Then depth of field was the issue. There are a lot of ideas but no standards.

AR: Are you happy with this situation?

MB: As a person who sells and hires out cameras I am very happy but I am upset because of the lack of knowledge among users. They use Alexa, they use Red and record in 4k then they convert it to 2K. Our cinema is 2K. 4K is like a joke for us, at least for the next 10 years. We cannot use 4K with our current equipment. We have only a few colour correction laboratories, Mr Kamarani (Pishgaman Cinema) and a few other offices. There are five Red Epics in Iran and 5 Alexa as well. But there is unfair competition. In general, post-production technicians are more knowledgeable than others because they have more time to read. In the past we called someone knowledgeable if they had read more pages of a camera manual. The lifetime of equipment in Iran is very short.

**Behnam, Masood. Pioneer in digital sound design and digital sound studios. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 26/08/2012**

AR: When and how did digital sound editing begin?

MB: We worked with huge analogue systems. We used 35mm tape and then we divided it to 17.5mm. Then Agfa produced 17mm tape for the third world. The first attempt was in 1376. The Iranian cinema used mono sound, computers came, and the first generation of software came. For example, I learned about software named Kick Walk.

AR: When and how did digital sound recording begin in Iran? Did it change anything dramatically?

MB: In terms of recording, the fast and best device was the Nagra, which had a 73db dynamic range and was very expensive. Then DAT was introduced; it was very small and covered a 90db dynamic range. It was not used in cinema. I

used it for music in 1372-73. We had a multi-effect processor (YAMAHA SPX 900). The home digital device came and little by little the difference between home and professional versions narrowed. However, no one wanted to use them in professional cinema. We still had an analogue 12-track mixer and we used six disc tables. As for sound recording, I should add that the first professional device was Porto-DAT, probably made by Sony. But Nagra-D was accepted completely. Then the multi-track devices came.

AR: Let's go back to digital sound editing.

MB: I started to make a native system. I found that we could edit sound on a computer in 1376. Later I found out that this is based on DTS system. We produced magnet sound for festivals. I recorded sound on the edge of the time code; the time code ran the computer and we put the CD of sound into the computer. We tested it here on the editing desk and it worked but it did not work in exhibition and we were going to become bankrupt. We tried to use it on *ESkadrane Eshgh* but we were late and we made a loss. So, we were defeated. I contacted Dolby in 1379 and we recorded *Motevalede Mahe Mehr* using Dolby SR in Paris. We did the sound design and mix in Paris. In Paris they had an Akai1500 which was computer-based. I connected it to the analogue editing suite and I could work on 16 sound tracks.

I bought one and imported it into Iran. The professional editing software was Avid at that time. I learned Pro-tools and young people realised little by little that they could edit sound with computers and everything became open.

We have all abandoned analogue since 1382-83. *Mehmani Maman* was edited by computer, and the sound and mix worked here. There were 60 faults in the negative cutting. From that time until 2-3 years ago, all films were synced twice - once with an editor's edit and once with a laboratory edit.

The movement of the young generation began in 1376. The Noendo and Pramise were introduced in 1384 and 1385. I accepted the first one. They had visual files as well. So, the 20000\$ system was replaced by a 1000\$ computer card.

AR: Do you think chaos is being caused in your profession by the introduction of amateurs who take the place of professionals?

MB: It was not a digital revolution; a syndrome, not a revolution. It was disastrous to some extent. It made specialization valueless. It ruins the quality of cinematic work and makes proficiency valueless. It generated a drop in quality. It was a disaster for cinema. A tyro who came to the studio became a master after seven years. But nowadays, anyone who knows the name of a computer can make himself a sound editor. Of course, it helped some talents to flourish, but here in Iran the negative points that caused a drop in quality were more important. They do editing, designing and mixing in the kitchen. It is wrong, especially mixing.

I imported an encoder, decoder and Dolby SR second-hand filters in 1381-82. But we cannot say it is Dolby because it is illegal. We did Dolby SR in Iran but we called it surround. However, we cannot do Dolby Digital here and it must be sent abroad. We did 5.1 mixing and then encoded it abroad. I have bought this kind of Dolby Digital since 1383 because I have a studio for it.

**Dehghani, Bahram. Master and board manager of the Iranian film editors society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 12/03/2012**

AR: Please describe the change in editing when digital editing was introduced into Iran.

BD: Basically, Iranian cinema does not tend to be industrial. As a result technology was not very important in this cinema. Iranian cinema has not followed industry and technology at all. Iranian cinema has been concerned about concept rather than technology in its history. When the computer became pervasive, a series of jobs used computers, such as typing. Then editing was included as well. There was no special resistance. Some editors resisted it because the technology was partial and incomplete. They did not trust editing by computer. There was no standard process for converting to digital file or from digital file to negative again. So there were just some attempts. The companies that offered these facilities were imperfect. Anyway, when it became pervasive, analogue editing suites were eradicated.

The generation that knows about computers were more interested in digital than the older generation but this did not plunge the cinema into crisis, such as a

resistance to film and sound etc. Learning technological knowledge took time, so the older generation asked the new generation for help. But no one misses the analogue editing desks now, ten years after their replacement, even if there are no nostalgic feelings. A few editors did not learn the new technology, mostly those over 65 years old.

AR: When did it become pervasive?

BD: I think it spread after 1380. I did my first edit with Avid in 1982. Nowadays, Final Cut is pervasive. 99 per cent of editors work with Final Cut and 1 per cent work with Avid. Avid is very expensive in Iran and you cannot find an original copy.

AR: What was changed in editing by digitalisation?

BD: Working with analogue or digital editing suites has not changed anything aesthetically. This means that, if a film had complicated editing, editing software was of no help. These kinds of software only help with special effects. If we remove computers we can still edit with good quality. Digital editing really helps with visual effects, even in cases of simple dissolves.

AR: Does digital editing endanger your proficiency as an expert editor who has worked with traditional editing desks?

BD: Traditionally, editors in Iran mostly worked based on their experience rather than their academic knowledge since before the revolution. They edited pictures and then dubbed the sound. However, each editor had several assistants abroad. The tradition of having assistants in Iran goes back to after the revolution and the introduction of sound [recording] to Iranian cinema and also the existence of academic editors. But there was just one assistant. Working with software does not interfere in this method. But an assistant who knows more about computers has a better position in the market because he is young and knows computers, while old editors perhaps do not know parts of the computer. Therefore, the number of assistants did not change here, whereas in Hollywood they sometimes had five assistants and software facilitates offering services.

The mechanical and technical aspects of editing became easier through the use of software. So perhaps some present-day editors would not approach the editing profession if it were not digital. Analogue required patience and editors did not use the trial-and-error method. But software gives the opportunity to use trial, error and correction.

They think I can edit because I can work with software. There are two mistaken routes. First, some people without experience and academic knowledge want to be editors. Second, some directors like to hire an assistant to do the editing. The economy department thinks this reduces the film's budget. However, in standard cinema (and Iran is not standard) everybody involved in the profession should be a specialist. So, by not being standard, the editing profession spread. Of course, 20-25 per cent take this wrong route but 75 per cent go via the natural route.

I see nothing in digital but good; we achieve the goal faster without consuming mechanical effort. Of course, there is a danger. As software is fast, you want to act fast and decide fast, which is wrong. The slow process of analogue editing gave you enough time for thinking. You should give yourself that chance now. The older generation of editors were not deceived by digital and they gave themselves that chance. So, if the editing time by analogue was two months, now it is one and a half months. Of course, it is related to discourse. There should be a thinking culture and it should not just be related to the analogue editing desk.

AR: What kind of digital software has been more convenient for you over time?

BD: At that time there was no original Avid software. I think I started working with Final Cut in 1383. Everything was based on personal attempts. As I remember, Premier was mostly used in TV and I did not work with this software but now I may use it.

AR: Could you tell me more about Resane Pooya?

BD: Resane Pooya was under the supervision of Jafar Fatemi, who was the first to try to make this technology pervasive. But they encountered faults and the analogue editing desks were more reliable. Some editors regretted using that editing even once. So it was terminated. I worked there for two days and

learned the software and they supported me with my work. I have never used an operator and I work directly with computers. But I consult about computer problems sometimes.

**Delpak, Mohamadreza. Pioneer in digital sound design. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 27/08/2012**

AR: When and how did digital sound editing begin?

MD: As Iranian cinema's film subjects are very simple and straightforward, they do not pay attention to sound and other techniques properly. The Iranian cinema had been shaped by dubbing since *Doktare Lor* which was dubbed in Italy. The cinema was mono. Of course we had some cinema theatre with four sound channels like Cinema Sahra. In fact, after the revolution, Iranian cinema was developed and we had sound recordings in scenes. Films were mono but artistic and they could be digital. They converted them to digital but exhibited them through mono channels, like *Bachehaye Aseman*.

Sound was digitalised first and then editing. Fatemi introduced non-professional Pro-Tools in Resane Pooya and made short videos. I worked on *Khabe Talkh* there, and *Yek Shab* by Niki Karimi. Mohsen Makhmalbaf worked there as well. Mr Kamrani introduced Merging as sound software. Mr Shahrzadi and Ms Mofakham also worked on this.

Generally there was a resistance among analogue technicians because they think software is not good. After the introduction of Nuendo, most of them used digital.

I started using Dolby SR after Bide Majnoon. Mr Behnam, Sammak, Narimizade and other studios used Nuendo. Most sound recordists used HHP and did not like Aton. This was the case for ten years.

As we do not have copyright in Iran we cannot say who was the first to use digital. Whoever was the first, they did not record it. We all started almost at the same time.

AR: Do you think chaos is being caused in your profession by the introduction of amateurs who take the place of professionals?

MD: We used trial-and-error culture. We did not train human resources. We imported equipment and learned. When digital was introduced, chaos ensued. People learned from one another and copied one another via trial and error. Thus, unfortunately groups of technicians were born, not artists. It was the same with music. Art is missed. Of course the old generation who came from analogue are famous. But the new generation did not come from the universities. There are some people in the body of cinema who have no academic knowledge, but they are artists and have experience.

AR: Do you like the digital editing software and do you prefer it to previous methods? Why?

MD: It was good for me. I worked ten years as a technician and learned a lot, and I use it now. Digital improved creativity and the speed of work among artists, but at the same time a group of technicians emerged who just do mechanical work and they are good for the television industry. In fact, digital does not change my speed of working. Previously, I worked on a film for three months, and I still do so today. This gives me chance to gain more experience without consuming more material. My sound is more beautiful and the artistic aspects are reinforced. The good Iranian films do not use technicians at the expense of artists.

I used Dolby SR in *Separation*, *About Elli*, *Bide Majnoon*, *Like Someone in love*, *Shirin*, *Kheili Door Kheili Nazdik*, *Yek Hafe Ghand* and *Khers*. Previously, copying a tape caused a reduction in quality but digital is not affected by copying.

I think Kiarostami introduced digital to Iranian cinema in *ABC Africa*. I worked on *ABC Africa* using Premier and exported the files. Then they converted them to Negative and Optic in France. In the case of *Ten*, he asked me to look at the film but he preferred to use what he had recorded by microphone. He wanted to delete everything but reality. In the case of *Shirin*, first I did the sound design and then Mr Kiarostami edited it. In the case of *Offside*, I did the sound design. In fact, the sound design introduced football more than the picture did.

We can do sound designing and mixing together in digital but we had to do it step by step in analogue. Sound editors can see the sound as well as hear it, but they could only hear in analogue. We can gain more experience without consuming more material, and surround sound also obviously helps the artistic part of the work.

Digital give us a chance to work on bad films more comfortably and more easily but in good films the results are the same in digital and in analogue.

**Faravrdesh, Mojtaba. Producer of *Kingdom of Solomon*. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 11/032012.**

AR: Let's talk about *Kingdom of Solomon*; what was your main concern?

MF: There are two issues, First, the film discusses the History of Jews and they believe he is a King but we believe he is a prophet for Muslims. Second, we started the film in 1385 but the exhibition was in 1388 after the presidential election. We discussed Fetne in the religious dominion and this plot was submitted to the reformist government. Therefore, after the problems of 1388, some people claimed that this film was made for the election. So they invaded the film and its exhibition in Iran and abroad, and because of that we did not have a successful exhibition. They even hacked one of our websites. This film is the most successful Fakher (big budget) film in Iran because it caused a development in cinema production and its box-office takings were good. It sold 3.5 milliards Tooman in Tehran just in the cinema. We did not have international distribution in cinemas, as I said, but we distributed it in DVDs. It is a big production project. The budget was five milliards Tooman. We had very extended and large sets. We built around 27,000 sq. m. of sets and we built them with real material not fake stuff. We also needed extras, etc. We suffered from financial inflation because the production was very long, as is the nature of big projects in Iran, and it was my first experience in Iran with this kind of film. We did not have a scanner and film recorder or the facilities of digital film. So, for preparation, first we made five minutes of film and did all the DI process. This was a special effects test, a DI test and a scanner test, etc. With regard to digital special effects, we discussed them with a lot of companies and some of



them were busy at that time. Also, we preferred to use this experience to establish this atmosphere in Iran because of the film. So, Mr Leo agreed to technologic transfer. The film has 40-50 minutes of special effects. We made a VFX site in Iran and imported some devices from Germany, gathering around 15 talented artists and technicians. We took some of them to Hong Kong and showed them the atmosphere of this job and made connections. So we made 50 per cent of the special effects here. Of course, the transportation of the project has its own problems. The cost of special effects in this film was 380 million Tooman but they said it was around one million dollars. Half of this was for Leo and the other half was consumed in Iran.

AR: What did you do in Iran? What did they do in Hong Kong?

MF: The Zabulun part, the smoke invasion, was done in Iran. The flying ship was made in Iran but the storm was made in Hong Kong.

AR: What was the specification of the storm, which was impossible in Iran?

MF: The rendering was hard. Rendering of water is very hard and we did not have facilities for that. There are some companies that are specialists in rendering. As for the last part (Jin), it was a collaboration. Part of it was in Iran and the other part was in Hong Kong. For example, extracting Jin from bodies was done in Iran. The last crane scene, which shows Jin, was made in Hong Kong. Most of the time, when we see Jin in close shot, this was made in Hong Kong. In fact, we did not have any experience. We gained experience from this film and now we can make chrome key screen, and in this case we are third in Asia. And our screens have the best quality.

*Kingdom of Solomon* caused some good events in Iran. First, after *Solomon* a few digital scanners were imported to Iran. We did not have good recorders or good digital colour grading (DI process). So after this film TV bought a scanner and film recorder and the *Mokhtar* series was converted to DI. We also printed copies of the film here in Filmsaz Studio. So we can print the Dolby Digital copy in Iran in good quality. As for sound, we cannot do Dolby Digital in Iran and we do surround in Iran. We did Dolby Digital and DTS for this film. The influence of this film at the 1388 Fajr Festival made some film-makers change their sound. Because of *Kingdom of Solomon*, the Fajr Festival separated the award for

special effects from visual effects and considered two awards in this regard. So now, we have a few companies that compete in the realm of visual effects, such as Roshana and Dr Motamedi. *Kingdom of Solomon* showed the demand for the DI process and caused these changes.

AR: Can we do DI in Iran now?

MF: We do not need to go abroad for DI and we are independent in this regard now. For example, Mr Kamrani has all the DI process equipment. We have also developed visual effects but this is an international process financially and in terms of experience. For example, for water, particle and render, the companies and countries need one another.

AR: What did Leo do? Did he dictate what we should have done here and what we should have done abroad?

MF: No, Mr Leo let us experience a lot of things and then we gave them to him to do if we could not do them. We did all the hard and doable (in terms of equipment) work here. There was a kind of advice and interaction.

AR: What about chroma key?

MF: I bought a screen from Germany and we run a laboratory here and have been working on it for eight months. Then we produced the screen.

AR: What about lighting?

MF: Mr Khozoei, our cinematographer, helped us with lighting. The last scene is completely chroma key and at some point it has eight layers. It was perfect.

AR: Critics say that they used night to cover their weakness; what is your answer to that?

MF: They do not have knowledge. Everything has a method. Using a method is not wrong. In the most films that have unreal scenes, the lighting and colour of the unreal parts are different from the real parts. It is a method of this kind of work. It is a special method. Secondly, in some day scenes we also have some very good blue screen usage and no one can recognise it, for example in the cemetery scene.

AR: But some parts of scenes show usage of chroma key:

MF: Maybe it is for psychological reasons. It means you expected it and you focus on probable faults too much.

AR: Did Mr Leo come to Iran?

MF: Yes, he came sometimes. *Zabulun* was made entirely in Iran. Most of the Jerusalem scene was done in Iran except one part made by Leo in Hong Kong. The beginning of the film was made by Leo as well.

AR: Do you think we are going to build a kind of production in the studio like Hollywood?

MF: No, we have a lot of problems. We do not have such a system. We imported some equipment for *Kingdom of Solomon* but it is not enough and it is not working now. We do visual effects for two reasons; it cannot be real (like smoke) or it costs a lot. For example, we spent one milliard on décor; had we not used visual effects, this would have risen to two and a half milliard Toman at least.

AR: Who funded this project?

MF: Farabi Cinematic Foundation and Oghaf Organisation, two governmental sectors.

**Ghasemkhan, Alireza. Film-maker, former head of Iranian cinema-tek, board manager of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers Society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 13/03/2012**

AR: When was digital cinema introduced in Iran? And what happened to documentary film-making?

AG: We should go back to the definition of documentary cinema to understand the relation between documentary and digital technology. The technology changed when Godard started film-making. This means there was a demand for change. The change comes from today's philosophy that pushes you to be more independent. Today's world has less convergence and more individualism. So, the technology takes the same path. There is a supreme idea

that pushes you to have independence in your thoughts. Where do we go with this independence? Documentary cinema is judged and changed.

The first film of documentary cinema was on Naserdin Shah Palace made by Ebrahim Khan Akasbashi. Cinema became a medium for the Shah for seeing the outside as well. We have a very important film lasting one minute and twenty seconds in this regard. It was filmed 113 years ago by Ebrahim Khan Akasbashi. Often he filmed the Shah and his courtiers. Why did he do that? It was because people had their own importance. In the Reza Shah era the situation was the same and cameras were controlled by the government. The camera went on to record and demonstrate people and their lives in 1340. This was because of technology. It means there were more cameras. The new attitude of documentary cinema was the consequence of this technology. Film-makers can achieve documents just by investigating in the society.

Events in small cities were recorded thanks to the development of the TV industry. For example: Arbaein by Naser Taghvaei. It was filmed by 16mm camera in 1350. It was a unique document about a famous singer.

Technology does not make a film-maker. A film-maker needs technology. Technology is not against our thought; it give us facilities to understand the world. There was a lot of footage about the revolution.

Documentary cinema has experienced rapid changes thanks to digital cameras. A film-maker does not ask for equipment from the government but he loses management as well. He even loses his self-management. A person who can film for hours is different from one who thinks for hours about using his few minutes' worth of negative cassettes.

Some young people think that if they do not follow the old methods they will be successful. But those methods created some great jobs.

The film-makers wrote a letter and said that "our cameras are not free and they are broken" while the police said "we are recording all events". So, the events were important for the government and film-makers as well. Some criticized them "but the cameras were working and mobiles recorded events; what do you expect to have? Did you want a 16mm camera?" Was the quality important? What was the thought behind the picture? Who can ban the small digital

camera and mobile camera from capturing documentary evidence of what ordinary people do at social events? The weakness of film-makers referred to technological weakness, whereas ordinary people made films of that event. There is a misunderstanding that technology pushes us to some absurd ideas.

On the other hand, we can see some single film-making which is considered author cinema. If a film-maker goes deep into his personality, he goes far away from the challenges of his society. Sometimes you can make a film when you manage a group. This kind of single film-making is simply the result of financial problems; it is not based on a theory.

Kiarostami's films are not popular in the US, because the film-making system is important in American cinema. Film-making thought is important in French cinema.

Iranians and Europeans use the same cameras but here they ask "what camera did you use?" They do not ask "who worked with that camera?" Digital generates negligence. We can make film with CCTV. We think everything in front of the camera deserves to be shown.

Management said "you should use 1/3 of your footage". It was not censorship; it resulted in better and further work. Film-makers become lenient thanks to technology. They film and correct it in editing. If technology were deleted, would we lose film-making?

It offers more facilities to creative film-makers, for example concerning light and working in remote areas. If someone believes that we can reach an idea just by technological changes, it will be possible but difficult. I think we should keep the thought as a basis and look at the first-generation masters.

Cinema must challenge in order to create something. The thought should be the first priority, not technology. Everything is open to an artist but in our country there are sometimes ups and downs. Considering new definitions, the border between art and charlatanism is very thin in the post-modern world. Some people forget meaning because they are fully involved in forms. Digital cinema gives you the real world very easily and it may prevent deep investigation.

AR: Has digitalisation increased the number of film-makers? To what extent does digital cinema make someone a film-maker?

AG: It is like a cone; in 16mm cinema the entrance was hard and small. One who entered had patience and did not expect too much from the world. He wanted to add something. Now, the society's membership has increased from 60 members in 1377 to 350 members. They are good film-makers. However, there are 2000 applicants at the door who think that they are film-makers, thanks to digital facilities.

AR: How many good film-makers can you name among the younger generation? What about those aged 30-40?

AG: Some of them just made one film and then quit. Soodabeh Babagar went to a lot of festivals with *Keshti Nooh*. But there have been no other films by her. Digital gave her a chance, she used it, and that is it. Recording documentary cinema has its complexity. There is a crisis in documentary cinema now. The film-making is not important. Thinking is important. Foreign festivals are like pests for us. They have different attitudes toward humans and nature, and some film-makers consider these the right attitudes.

**Ghobadi, Bahman. Internationally recognized digital film-maker. Interviewed by Hale Hanji and Alireza Razazifar on 08/03/2014.**

HH: What is your attitude to digital cinema? (Please mention your views on digital cameras, mini digital cameras, and the editing and digital format for distribution via the Internet or DVD)

H (BG): He said that he only suggests digital cameras to those who have a lot of experience because it spoils acting and artistic work if they do not have enough experience, and they easily lose shots and frames because frames are not important for them. Previously he preferred negatives but he likes digital now as well as negatives. He said that people record a lot of useless footage on hard disc carelessly. They should be careful about pictures. The other point about digital is distribution on YouTube and the Internet. Festivals only accept

limited numbers of digital works, so it would be better if they sent film copies rather than sending film online.

HH: Why did you choose a digital camera for your film?

H (BG): He used digital because it is a light camera and the cost of film-making is lower. It is mobile and easier to transport. He said that, “nowadays, we can use digital as well as negative just if we know the spirit of cinema and look at the digital like negative, take it seriously and work with it accurately”.

H: Do you honestly trust digital cameras artistically?

H (BG): He said that if the look of the director is accurate and he concentrates, he can trust them. He said that the “look of the film-maker can respect digital like negative”.

HH: What do digital devices contribute to making films innovatively, artistically or financially?

H (BG): He said that they have lower costs and are more portable. In addition, the picture can be as good as a negative if you have experience and an artistic view. Instead of filming and sending everywhere, film-makers should be focused on artistic work in front of the camera.

HH: What is your opinion on using stars or professional actresses when you work with a digital camera?

H (BG): Equipment does not influence acting. In a good work, a good director must be able to achieve acceptable performances. If the rules are followed properly, equipment does not matter.

HH: Do you think there is an emerging new generation of film-makers due to digital devices?

H (BG): He thinks that young and inexperienced people should not start with digital. They should achieve some experience and work for two or three years with negatives. Then they can achieve quality by using their experience and artistic view.

HH: You used non-professional and professional actors and hand-held cameras in both *Half Moon* and *No One Knows about Persian Cats*. What's the

difference between these two films in terms of directing (size of shots, camera movement and *découpage*) and acting?

H (BG): He said that he did not realise the capability of digital in *Half Moon* but now he thinks he could make *Half Moon* in digital. He thinks both of them are like the same dress and *Half Moon* could be as successful as *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, because *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is his best film in terms of box office and fans.

**Hasan Hasandoost. Master and board manager of the Iranian Film Editors Society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 27/08/2012**

AR: How and when did you start digital editing? What was the first editing software that you heard about and when did you find it as a user?

HH: About 12 years ago, I worked on *Barefoot to Harat*, a video documentary by Majid Majidi, and I used non-linear digital editing for the first time. I used DPS Velocity. I had not worked with computers before and Esmaeil Habibnejad taught me how to use computers and editing software. That hardware and software was very interesting to me but it did not give us EDL files, so we could not use it in editing negatives. I wanted to work with the traditional analogue system again in *Bide Majnoon*; then Mr Saharkhiz assured me that he could solve that problem for us in *Bide Majnoon*. So we changed the positive rushes to video files and edited them with DPS and then edited the positive; finally, I sent the edited positive to the laboratory for cutting of the negatives. However, after the introduction of Final Cut Pro every problem was solved and we did not need positives at all. So, I get rid of the analogue editing suite because it gave us 24 frames, edge number and EDL file as well.

AR: What about digital editing before that time?

HH: There was a company named Rasane Pooya directed by Jafar Fatemi. He had a system for editing but it was full of faults. Ms Mastane Mohajer, Ms Shahrzad Pooya and Ms Hayede Safiari worked there for a while.

AR: What was the problem?



HH: The laboratory and sound were incomplete in terms of technology. These changes gradually became pandemic. However, for Iran, Final Cut is the most suitable software.

The guys who started with analogue editing desks are better editors compared to those who started with computers. In analogue, a cut took 10-15 minutes before you could see the result. This means that work was time-consuming, so you were thinking about that cut during work. You even thought about that cut before work in order to avoid absurd work. But the young generation did not experience this and no one trains them to think about it. So, maybe their work has become mechanical and non-artistic. However, I dominate on the computer and I do not let them accelerate. This means I think before I cut. So, editing by computer takes me as long as analogue did. It only accelerates the operation time, not the thinking time. Of course, it is a little less time-consuming.

Digital cameras make our work harder. Directors just record and they do not think about their work on the night before filming. This has occurred because of the need to reduce filming expenses. The importance of thought and pre-design terminates in directing. Negatives had their limitations but this (digital) causes a lot of problems. Even in acting. An actor thinks that, if he makes a mistake, they will take another shot; hence, he does not rehearse and does not take it seriously. This means that film has lost its previous power. It has lost its feeling and become mechanical.

AR: In all parts?

HH: You can see the thought in independent cinema but in commercial and mainstream cinema you find that the computer and technology rule and dominate. We should emphasise thought in our teaching departments.

AR: Does digital editing endanger your proficiency as an expert editor who worked with traditional Moviola?

HH: It seems that film-making is becoming easier, so a lot of people are encouraged to make films because it is digital and they can take a shot again if they make a mistake. It is cheap as well. Programming, script and decoupage get weaker. I think they should edit a documentary and then move on to professional drama cinema but they dare to come to cinema editing without any

experience. This is because of producers who do not care about art, or even box office.

AR: What about the positive aspects?

HH: You can find a difference between digital and analogue in a good film. Digital give me that opportunity to change a lot and gain more experience. If the time consumed in editing a film was two months for me, after the introduction of digital editing this was reduced to one and a half months, as the technology helped me to avoid wasting time on mechanical work, but it does not reduce the time for thinking about editing.

In fact, at the beginning I was against digital because I thought I could not touch digital footage and touching film was very important for me. I touched it and marked it with a pencil. Nowadays, everything is virtual and it makes film strange for us.

**Heydarian, Mohammad. Producer and former cinematic deputy of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 11/08/2012.**

AR: What is digital cinema? (What is your definition of digital cinema?)

MH: Generally it is a cinema which uses digital equipment and digital technology (which has replaced film) in production. Other aspects are distribution and digital exhibition. We can consider them related or separate from one another. There is a range of relations between digital and cinema.

AR: What is the consequence of introducing digital cinema in Iran?

MH: In my general approach two aspects are important. The first is usage of digital equipment in film production to facilitate work. Digital is cheaper and has more facilities. Film equipment is expensive. It cannot be smaller than a certain size because the film is large (35mm). Its high cost affects everything from transporting to other aspects. It is the opposite of digital.

Thus, the first consequence is that digital is pervasive and we can exhibit digital film for all people. For example, if we had 100 film students 25 years ago, we

had a simple camera with which just six students could work. So, even touching a camera was hard. Now everybody has his own camera at home. So, being pervasive is a kind of revolution in itself, like the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. It could be considered one of the most pervasive media in terms of production and exhibition. The cheapest projector was super8 but now every home has a digital DVD player. So, it is a revolution in all aspects, from teaching to production and then exhibition.

The second consequence is usage of digital technology in professional cinema. This is very important but not as much as the previous point. In fact, cinema has not replaced other media but has become more pervasive.

Since it was invented, every few years or decades cinema has managed to generate an event and a change in itself in order to make itself attractive and fresh, such as size of screen, colour film, sound and 3D. Then special effects became stronger. Now we are in digital revolution, something that directors had never imagined. A writer creates an idea and writes something and a director tries to demonstrate it. In digital cinema, the feeling and general description of the director is enough for directing digital special effects technicians and it leads them to create something which satisfies the director's feelings. This means that sometimes directors achieve something more than their imaginations. In fact, the image can be as deep as the director's idea.

It is a kind of revolution. Now we can serve all ideas. Digital technology can make the world more virtual and it expands its domination.

AR: When was digital cinema introduced in Iran?

MH: It started like a bracelet. For example it started in Youth Cinema by facilitating in terms of film equipment. We had started Youth Cinema with two cameras and a few negative portions but this changed after digitalisation. So everywhere could have offices of Youth Cinema. They just needed teachers.

AR: When?

MH: In the late 1370s.

AR: What are the consequences of digital cameras and digital editing in Iran?

MH: In terms of professional work, a lot of films were produced in a different way (digital) and they did not pass through governmental gates (negative and sound material). So, managers have limited information about those films. This means that a huge amount of production (50 per cent of analogue cinema production) was made digitally. This was the early 1380s. So we arranged two separate sections in the Fajr Festival for Film and Digital.

The first reaction of government is to worry about what is different from the mainstream and to mount a kind of resistance if that phenomenon has a completely different mechanism. Of course that phenomenon presented certain opportunities but it raised worries as long as it could not adapt itself to the system. So, we were worried about digital and its future and how we could supervise this phenomenon. Of course we knew it would not be like analogue. So, we had to find a new method of cultural supervision.

Digital gradually found its rightful position, from having two sections to considering a share and now, in terms of professional work, it is not important if a film is digital or analogue. It can be converted to 35mm. In addition, home video has its own system in this regard.

AR: What do you do for or against the digital cinema (or parts of it such as digital camera)?

MH: A cultural manager is concerned about the rejection of the old system. He is also concerned about output. He wants to control quantity and quality. This means that, if we have 300 cinemas, we cannot make 3000 films because the market is limited. Although the cinema is not governmental, government must take care of it. We put a limit on the number of film productions every year. Someone can make a film with his own money but the consequence of failure and losing money in cinema is important for the government. Cinema would be losing its potential capital. So, at first the government prohibited production and then did not accept the consequence of failure. In fact, in digital the manager thinks that he lost his control in the market because the market is not free like in Western countries. So it may cause chaos. Therefore it was not acceptable for a while. Then the independent section finds its position. Of course, there were a lot of claims for making good films but then some of them said we can simply convert it to 35mm after production.

After this stage, the cinema gradually reached the next stage, the second revolution: digital special effects.

Digital special effects have a serious role in two films. There is an important position for digital special effects in world cinema and for an international audience. If we neglect this part of cinema we will lose our importance in world cinema. In *Muhamad*, digital special effects should serve spiritual things.

AR: When did you face digital special effects in your career for the first time?

MH: We have done digital special effects for 15 years (Since I was in Sima Film). Mr Pejhan has done special effects for ten years.

We started by encouraging the private sector with an incentive policy. Mr Pejan brought a CGI laboratory using a governmental loan of five milliard Toomans. The idea of Sharake Cinemaei Hashtgerd was based on digital cinema. It should have different studios and green screen studios. This idea was formed in 1384. We gave loans to the private sector for digital sound. We made a very comprehensive study about digital exhibition in cinema as well. We provided loans for digital editing in 1378. We supported the private sector in government. But the private sector did not need governmental support for digital cameras.

We have never thought that we will have to move completely to digital. We have our old-generation cinematographers who are very artistic. We can still recognise the difference between celluloid and digital. If we want to move to 4K quality, it will be very expensive. We can still recognise the difference between film and digital quality in terms of texture and colour.

If we have more active technicians and artists, we will achieve better artistic results. We are adopting this policy in cinema.

Dr Etemadi arrived when I was in Sima Film. Then Dr Motamedi entered this field. We started with digital editing in 1376 and then we supported special effects. At that time digital special effects were a kind of post-production service, not a creative work. But it will become more creative little by little and we can make some films or present some ideas just by using it.

In the case of *Muhamad*, since the early days we knew we should have used CGI because of the character of the prophet and the subject: For example, the

wave that delivered a mountain of fishes to the coast or a cloud which moves with the prophet. From the first day we did not limit our imagination. We should have used all aspects of digital special effects. Sometimes it helped us financially but sometimes we could not work without it.

**Kiarostami, Abbas. Master and pioneer in digital cinema in Iran. Interviewed Alireza Razazifar on 02/09/2012.**

AR: The interviewer explained his research into digital film-making in Iran and stated different aspects of it from acting to representing reality. He then asked for his opinions.

AK: In my opinion, digital cinema is the cinema of liberation and release. It is a release from the difficulties of cinema, especially capital. I think digital has made a difference in acting. Digital affects everything because of the different kinds of camera (even mobile cameras) and the films that are recorded. They assign a medium. Nowadays, nobody accepts the old method of acting and no one recommends that you change your method of acting. The changes in acting are completely unconscious, because we find a real scale of ourselves and see the recorded film. Therefore we do not approve of a film that has exaggerated acting. I remember when I was young, Anthony Quinn was one of my ideal actors, and I watched his films because of his acting. Now when I see his acting (during my journeys in aeroplanes) I am surprised at how I admired him for his acting. There is also an equivalent among Iranian actors. I mean, generally the acting changes and [digital cinema] has a significant effect on actors and acting as you mention it, and in another way on film-making itself. I mean, new film-makers who have no chance to pop into cinematic companies [now are making film]. [At the moment] there are no Super8 and 16mm films, so you must make 35mm film or (if we do not have digital) we are a long way from this circle.

A lot of our film-makers use digital because they have no 35mm equipment, not because they believe in the circumstances of digital or admire it as a new phenomenon. It is just because they find it cheaper and they have no choice. Their ideal is 35mm.

However, the characteristics of digital camera are different. The approach to this camera is different as well. When I released *10 on Ten*, they thought I was a propagandist for digital film, whereas this transition was inevitable. It is not an option. It is compulsory. This compulsion brings us a lot of facilities. When I finished *Ten*, I invited the head of *Cinema Tec* in France (who is my friend) to attend a screening of my film in the *Balzak* amphitheatre. He said that not only would he not come but also he would never come to that amphitheatre (because it showed digital film). He was too prejudiced against digital film. Many people react to digital like that, in photography and in film as well. I heard that 60 per cent of Hollywood films used digital cinematography this year. These are facilities of digital cinema that we can investigate separately.

You point to acting; basically it changes the way of pondering about cinema.

A lot of films could not be made without digital cinema, such as *Shirin* and *Ten*. In particular, it would be impossible to make *Ten*. *Ten* is the most private film to have been made. The entire cast and crew (five actors with backstage personnel) amounted to just nine persons. Nine people were involved in making this film, but in a 35mm project nine persons would be needed just to lead and manage the 35mm camera. Therefore, a lot of films like *Five*, like *Shirin* and a lot of short films [could not be made without a digital camera]. This is not limited to the cinema that we know, i.e. a bunch of films made in Iran; I don't know about the rest of the world, and I am not talking about commercial films - I am talking about experimental cinema. For example, in Yazd [a city in central Iran], they make the kind of films that may amaze you. They are renovating cinema (re-inventing it). They do not know about 35mm cinema. They have discovered cameras (maybe by using mobile cameras) and then discovered a world that cannot be discovered by 35mm camera. I think we have not yet discovered everything we can do with digital cameras. But gradually it will be discovered.

Do you investigate documentaries in your research or not?

AR: Yes, in each part when I start a subject I investigate documentaries as well as docudramas.

AK: I made *Close Up* with a 35mm camera several years ago; however, when I watched it again two weeks ago (after several years), I thought that if we had

had digital cameras, *Close Up* would have become *Close Up*. All the elements of digital film-making were ready: me, my thoughts, usage of non-actors. In fact, following the reality, the discovery of fact, how would it have been possible with a 35mm camera, a professional cinematographer and lighting? Although it is named among the top 50 films in cinema history, when I saw it I said I wish we had had digital cameras in order to present the real validity of that film. I think that nowadays a lot of *Close Ups* have been made, just with the help of the facilities of digital cameras. It is hard to me to say “sound, camera, action” in front of non-actors; sometimes I did not say “cut” (in the last part of the scene) and the whole crew were under pressure because of that.

Digital cameras, with their modesty, silence and size, facilitate ways towards cinema *verite*, although cinema *verite* was created before digital cameras.

The investigation and research into digital camera effects is not my business; you should investigate what is happening in lighting. In my opinion it is very effective. It means that you omit the intensive light and reduce the number of lamps and lights. It creates facilities for actors that are impossible with 35mm cameras. I recognize, even in ordinary Iranian films, that the actors have changed more than the film-makers. I mean the acting of Iranian actors has changed with the help of the modesty, silence and ability of digital cameras.

AR: What about the representation of reality? For example, when we omit extra lights, is the picture closer to a real picture of the world (in comparison with 35mm cinema)?

AK: You should not ask me about that. It is your responsibility. Just compare one of the actors of the 50s or 70s with ordinary actors of today. You can see the difference. If you are a fan of Stanislavsky and you come to cinema for acting, that acting is not acceptable. So the digital technology cheats in this case. Because of cinema’s disloyalty to theatre, fans of theatre dislike cinema because they believe that the act should be highly exaggerated in order to be seen by the audience at the back of the amphitheatre. Which acting do you mean? I think it is very nice research. But I think it requires objective indications. It is not just writing, if you compare some acting with video. It means the



changes in acting, lighting and in *mise en scene*...but I do not think in *mise en scene*. I think the only negative point about digital cinema, in comparison with 35 mm, is that the *mise en scene* is eliminated. The camera, light and the facility of it do not permit the director to think about *mise en scene*. In 35mm films, the *mise en scene* ruled. And in this regard (how much *mise en scene* is suitable for drama and how much is sufficient for cinema veriete) [we should discuss it.]

AR: As for the aesthetics of digital cinema, do you accept...

AK: It is changed. You should investigate yourself

AR: It is about you, yourself. Do you like the aesthetics of digital cinema?

AK: Digital cinema in some aspects ...you do not see my last film ...I did my last film based on the standards of the 35 mm camera, because the picture of cinema that we see is the collection of films that we have seen so far, not your ideal, the cast that is gathering around digital camera, the effects of their ideas on cinema. The majority of these are the director's responsibilities. However, having a mutual agreement with cinematographers who use digital cameras is quite difficult, because they think they can work very simply. They think that digital filming is unfinished filming. They say: You take it. We change it in the laboratory and post-production, we correct it. It ruins some media. The cinematographer thinks about his work less and the aesthetics of a scene are mostly related to the cinematographer's profession. The cinematographer takes the film because he believes that all of this stuff will be corrected, and we also have this idea. However, when it comes to the laboratory ...so you want to finish the film project and you do not use the obsession you normally use for 35mm film. Naturally, it might be affected and harmed by this, because of carelessness in comparison with 35mm camera work.

AR: Do you agree with comparisons between *Taste of Cherry* and *Ten*? Is it a decent selection?

AK: I think so; both of them include everything that I told you. I mean we suffered from carelessness in *Ten*.

AR: There is something to discuss; you put *Certified Copy* and *Ten* in the digital cinema category but there are a lot of differences between them, and in terms of aesthetics.

AK: Is this interview with me about my works or about your research?

AR: It is about the research that I mentioned

So, you should find the answer. You should find which factors interfere in them. The most important factors are a producer, an international language and international actors. Anyway, the commercial cinema imposes itself. *Ten* is among 10 films selected by some critics whereas *Certified Copy* is not. This shows that I did not enjoy the kind of freedom in *Certified Copy* that I had in *Ten*. The cinematographer and I compromised to make a film with the scale of a 35mm film in *Certified Copy*. The camera is Red, our decorator and scene designer, budget ... but as I told you, the entire cast and crew of *Ten* were less than ten people and we called it *Ten* perhaps because of that. However, around 100 people were involved in *Certified Copy*.

The aim of digital is to approach a kind of cinema that professional cinema cannot approach. It is impossible to reach this destination. The film made by an amateur in Yazd has certain values that *Certified Copy* lacks, and these are the roles of accident, freedom and discovery. We can use these factors in professional cinema. The shadow of capital exists here. There is no room for risk.

I think they are what you should find.

AR: Yes of course

AK: I think it is a very nice project that will work well if you offer some visual facts as well. Bring an old film and see what has happened in acting. It does not mean a professional actor acting in a digital film and changing his method. He is just a witness to others; maybe he will say that he does not act for digital cameras or perhaps his director and producer are against digital cinema.

AR: Do you mean, he is affected unconsciously and finds out that that kind of acting is not acting anymore?

AK: He watches film consciously. If you do not record it, I will name an Iranian actor and ask you to see his new acting. You cannot tolerate the old-fashioned acting. It is like wearing very old-fashioned dress, even worse. They show you something new and they cannot go backwards to exaggerated cinema. The stars that acted in those films (35mm) now act digitally. I see all old acting as artificial, exaggerated and theatrical. Maybe the home-made (family) video affects actors. Actors either see them or they do not; people see what is real and they cannot tolerate it.

AR: Among the things I mentioned in digital cinema, what is the most important factor; the change in acting or representation of reality or ...?

AK: I cannot answer this question. I mean I should not answer it. It is not what we should be talking about. It is something that you should find out. I think it can be found by comparing two films in terms of acting, décor, scenery and light.

The bad effect of digital cameras is hand-held filming. You know, it is a very rare action for 35mm cameras. Nowadays, for a scene that obviously should use a tripod, you see they use the hand-held method and everything is shaking. I watched a version of *Dr Zhivago* (new version) yesterday and suddenly realized that the camera was hand-held; I asked whether it was really *Dr Zhivago* and they said yes. I said it is impossible. So they said it is a new release. So, just compare these two versions and find out the extent to which the hand-held camera harms this classical work...

AR: Is it because of digitalisation?

AK: It is a side effect of digital cameras; every good thing may have a side effect.

Finally, Razazifar explained other aspects of his dissertation. Mr Kiarostami stated that he had updated his ideas since *10 on ten*: "I know something about digital which at that time I did not know". He emphasised that the researcher should have a visual witness for his thesis, especially about acting. He added: "digital film-making, like other phenomena, proceeds correctly, and after a period of time produces some visual rubbish under the name of digital film, but we should not take them into consideration."

**Kiarostami, Abbas. Master and pioneer in digital cinema in Iran.  
Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 19/04/2014.**

AR: Referring to our previous interview, have you changed your ideas since realising *10 on Ten*?

AK: I am sure about my acting ideas. I heard that acting classes in the USA will soon be obsolete. They will only teach non-professional acting. This is good news. It means that they will have non-professional cinema and teach film-makers how to work with non-professional actors. I cannot tolerate watching some old movies just because of the kind of acting. The acting which I recognised as good acting seems feigned now. The meaning of good acting has changed for me. You should wait for a few years if you do not believe me.

I discussed everything in *10 on Ten* except editing. Today, I am sure, pure cinema is not made on the editing desk. Now I am thinking about film that is made before editing. Therefore editing does not have a significant role. There is no editing section in *10 on Ten* and it was not in my mind. I made it *Ten* but did not point out the editing. The editing is just cutting the heads and ends of shots if necessary. We hope to see a film in one take. We do editing to make real time from broken time. So, we should not explain a repairing action as a creative action. This seems a slightly dogmatic idea. Yes it is, but I do not believe in creative editing. It is like repairing. It is like darning a rug. Is there a kind of creative darning? When we have a rug that is rotten, we darn it in a very good way. Editing is like darning the ruptured part of a rug. Or when we restore an old painting and no one can recognise the damaged part any more. The good editing is like this. Artistic and pure cinema is not made in an editing suite. It is made at the time of filming.

AR: If I say “the cinema of Kiarostami has lost the need to edit further and further”, is this true?

AK: Yes, absolutely right. Because I say my favourite films do not have real editing. The editing shows a time, a thing, and a story. Long stories are for novels. In novels the date lasts, children get old, which is not my favourite. It belongs to the novel period. Cinema has a continuous beating time. It means

we both have same pulse. It does not need editing. Look at two good films. They either do not need editing or you do not realise it. I cannot deny creative editing but I am personally looking for a creative cinema that does not need editing. This means that I would state my story without an extra repairing touch.

AR: It is a very big issue.

AK: It is not so big. The films that have running time appeal to me more. I am looking for a key. I observe something which cannot be observed again and it is not artificial. Editing is in the structure of cinema. It belongs to industry. It is not part of cinema as art. The art of cinema does not need editing. This means we can see what we take without a medium. It means we take something pure and then we change it to film in the studio. I think the rushes are cinema, not edited film. Rushes are real cinema. If you look at the rushes of a film you can tell whether the film is good or not. Even when the director says 'cut' and the actor turns, looks at the camera or smiles or appears surprised. They are part of the film and show whether the acting is good or not. This means that when we say 'cut', to what extent is the actor disrupted?. It is an assessment for an actor. I think the rushes are more cinema than edited film. I saw a film last night. It was full of grain. This means the light was low and he was filming. The director said I designed everything and I played and there were two of us but the film was very good and shaky. I had the good fortune to make those films previously; otherwise I would not have dared to make them. Cinema has made good improvements. Let's see a lot of deception in cinema. I mean the deception gets out. I am not talking about the cinema industry. In the cinema industry, a good editor can make a good and impressive film from absurd rushes.

AR: We discussed two points from *10 on Ten*. In my interviews with editors, I found that digitalisation has no role in editing but you go further now, and you say that editing has no role in your cinema.

AK: Of course it has a role in my cinema but I wish to reduce its role in the future. But it existed. I used editing in my previous work out of hopelessness. I wish I had told my story in one take without any artificial action. I do not gain any fascination from that kind of film.

AR: Did you watch *Time Code* by Figgis, which does not have editing?

AK: I did not watch it.

AR: Do you have new idea about scripts?

AK: No

AR: Do you consider *Certified Copy* and *Like Someone in Love* as digital films?

AK: No, they could be 35mm. No, they are not digital. Digital films are those that cannot be made by 35mm; in no way. This means it is possible with large amounts of capital from around the world but it is not necessary. *Five* is a digital film. *Five* could not have been made without a digital camera. It is one-man film-making. The film that I talked about, *Sellool*, was a digital film. You cannot make digital films with 35mm cameras. 35mm belongs to industrial cinema. I think art cinema has received its facilities via digital. There was art cinema. Film-makers made great efforts but there were no facilities. However, there are facilities in digital cinema that give every artist opportunities. I taught a student for a few years and I asked him when he wanted to start his film. It is a very simple film involving his parents at his home. He said he would start from 15 Bahman and would take 15 days for pre-production. I hate this for a film that someone makes with his parents in his own home. This is for 35mm film. It is for commercial film.

But the film that I talked about, *Sellool*, is very impressive and was made by my other student. It is 110 minutes long and was made in four days without any costs, just food. It is about a person in a cell who cannot stand or sleep. He has just a spoon and a bowl in a very small place. It was very good. American cinema terminates our courage. Making this kind of film needs courage. It was a very humanistic film, a report about a prisoner. You see 90 minutes of it and you think about the time. Does this kind of cinema need a script? Does this kind of cinema need editing? Need picture quality? Of course not. It has grain and just a part of him is in shot. We enter his world via sounds. Total art. This means I would say differently if I made *10 on Ten* now. This film is against today's cinema. Whenever I go to shops, I see the new family films, a girl, couple of boys, bad guy, good guy. They are produced like garbage and people consume them. It is hard to think about cinema. The world is on a strange path. Then, when you see a film like this, you are surprised.

AR: Is this kind of digital film closer to art or to reality?

AK: Both of them, I think this is a film inspired by reality

AR: Compared to pre-digital film, I mean. For example, compared to one of your films such as *Through the Olive Oil*, is it closer to art or reality, or maybe we should not compare it?

AK: In fact, film should be believable. The basis of any artwork is reality but if it remains on this level, it is an existing reality that is recorded. You can look through your window and see a film for 90 minutes, completely real without any artificial action, but it is not art. Art is selection. The first part of art is selection. What exists and what does not exist. I talked to that student and he said 'my subject is a prisoner'. This is a universal subject. We are told that we have more prisoners than other countries but the subject is universal and it is not limited to prison as a building. It can be expanded to the nature of being prisoner. It becomes art because I did not know about this kind of prison. It means that you cannot stand and sleep in prison. When you show this in this way, it is art. You can hear the sound of doors and the voice of the warder. You show the suffocation of a cell without using those sound effects. He does not use ordinary sound effects. So we see the elimination of some unnecessary elements because they are clichés and have a bad effect (like the warden, some violence). So it becomes an art that comes from a real subject. Prisoner is a reality. Cell is a reality. We approach artistic reality by eliminating extra elements, factors and clichés that are no longer effective for us. The subject is real, personality is real. If you put a camera in a prison, it does not have this effect. So it is art. So what is the art here? Elimination of all dramatic clichés.

AR: You said *Close Up* is a digital film which you made by 35mm camera. You told me in a previous interview that if you were to make *Close Up* by digital it would be much better. What did you mean by that? It would be better in terms of reality or art?

AK: I do not separate these. It would be both

AR: Directors do not separate them but critics do

AK: I correct myself. Firstly, I doubt that any question starts with "if". I prefer not to answer these kinds of questions and I do not start any discussion with "if".

AR: Actually, I was looking for some clarification of my previous question.

I was wrong. There is no moment in the film that I think is artificial or that, if it were digital, it would have been better and I would have repeated it again and again until I achieved something better. Everything satisfies me to some extent. For example, Mr Ahankhah was a little bit bossy and talked very posh but I dealt with that because, first, he has a dialect and also he was a colonel and he sits in front of the camera. If you consider all these parameters, it is completely believable that a colonel with Turkish dialect, sitting in front of camera, seems a little bit bossy. It is not a problem of the film. There is nothing in the film that I think might have been improved by a digital situation. So my previous answer - if I had had digital I would have made it better – means that I would have made it more easily and with more facilities and less fear. I would call *Mosafer* a more digital film. There was a common point between Sabzian and Ghasem Joolaei in that film. Both of them were inaccessible. This means they were not under my control. They were exceptional and the best people because they did not recognise me as the director. I could not dominate them. They were stubborn and rebellious. They sometimes did not turn up for scenes. They had plans for themselves. I begged Ghasem Joolaei to speak certain lines because we had limited negative. He refused to let the ball into the goal as a goalkeeper. He said 'I am a halfback, not a goalkeeper'. I forced him to be a goalkeeper and he did not accept it. This film is more digital than *Close Up*. So I correct my previous statement. I worked more easily. But both subjects were digital.

**Makhmalbaf, Mohsen. Master and pioneer in digital cinema in Iran.  
Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 27/08/2011**

AR: What is your attitude to digital cinema? (Please mention your views on digital cameras, mini digital cameras, and the editing and digital format for distribution through the Internet or DVD)

MM: I have a modernistic enthusiasm and it is part of my character. When the new facilities come we should not confront them. There was a wave of confrontation against digital cinema. The government imported a few modern analogue editing suites and I questioned this. Now they are asked why they did



that. So they think they should have moved after a while. Some editors said they love splicers, and when they work with them and make cuts they feel certainty. There was a seminar about Avid and the analogue editing suite, and an editor said that when the splicer was introduced, there was the same resistance. I was among the first editors to sell my analogue editing suite and edit with Avid.

Another issue is author cinema. A huge amount of equipment means that you have to seek governmental support. But in making *Testing Democracy* without permission, we tried to show that we could transfer ideas with few facilities and a cheap camera, and the real author cinema was born. There was a handy-cam Sony which Meysam used to record behind the scenes, and Hana had made a film in video 8. The first exhibition was at the Venice Film Festival. It was part of the Kish Stories series.

Digital cameras reduce the cost of film-making and censorship and we can use them like a pen. I had a friend who knows nothing at all about cinema. I asked him to come and work with me to prove that digital cameras do not require cinematic knowledge. I just wanted to show how you can use a camera as a pen. The film has dialogue and discussion, not monologues, so I showed the extent to which this equipment can aid democracy. It reduces the domination of capital, decreases the censorship and even reduces the domination of technicians in cinema.

Previously, you needed a producer who chose a script from among those on offer. Then came governmental censorship followed by a group of technicians who imposed their own abilities, tastes and weakness on the film. This means that a poor cinematographer cast his shadow over the film. Digital reduced all of this. It was a revolution in the relations of cinema production. Domination of capital was terminated, and censorship and the domination of technicians were reduced.

The speed of production accelerated. When you went onto the streets with a 35mm camera everybody looked at it, but no one looks at digital cameras. So the effort of reproducing reality in front of the camera is eliminated and is replaced by the effort of recording my attitude to this reality. We also got rid of extra equipment and crew.

We changed the film from a directors' monologue to a dialogue between two directors, one of whom knows nothing about cinema. I ran away from making films with a 35mm camera and started making films with my friend.

AR: Do you honestly trust digital cameras artistically?

M: I trust them aesthetically. It is just a medium. If someone knows what he wants to make, he can do artistic work with it. I made *Afghan Alphabet* with it for UNICEF. The subject was Afghan refugee children (population 747,000) who could not go to school in Iran. There were 100,000 children in Zahedan and Zabol. We made it in a week and edited it in a week as well. We showed the film to the government. A discussion was raised and they were convinced by the film. It is my best film because it changed the destiny of Afghan children and 500,000 children went to school. This would have been impossible without digital cameras. I wanted to enter this atmosphere and record it. I was behind the camera and also recorded the sound.

So to what extent can we trust it? In fact, digital is gradually developing itself, so we can apply lenses now.

Digital gave us a lot more than it took from us. Of course it has some problems. Previously, some bad censorship and selections prevented some talented people (even if he was Tarkovsky) from being film-makers but the producer made sure that his investment was safe and that the audience would like the film. The technicians knew they would get their money after production. When it became a pen, time would have been wasted until everything returned to normal.

There are lot of pens but not everyone is a writer. Homes are full of pens but few people are writers. One who has nothing to say does not write a book. However, the temptation of playing with a camera produces a huge quantity of footage which does not originate from artistic thought. It was just playing with cameras. Therefore, cinema suffered from dizziness for a decade. Suddenly thousands of films were submitted to Cannes and Venice and the selection became weak because of the noise. Anything recorded was called film. Now it is better and we have a better future. It is a pen and the hand is a hand of an

artist. I call it the noise period. Someone with a name similar to mine makes films and sends them to festivals.

AR: What are your ideas about using stars or professional actresses when you work with a digital camera?

MM: I have made 18 films and I used professional actors only in *Honarpishe* and *Naseredin Shah Actore Cinema*. In terms of digital cameras, working with non-actors is better because huge cameras frighten non-actors. Of course, some professional actors did not recognise small digital camera as a professional device in early days and considered it too small to be serious.

They made documentary films with digital cameras. Hana made *Budha Az sharm Foro Rikht* with a \$2000 camera. Everything got lighter. For example, if Hana had wanted to make a film in Afghanistan with a 35mm camera, it would have been impossible.

AR: Do you think there is an emerging new generation of film-makers due to digital devices?

MM: The first generation in the West had learned cinema through photography and painting and then came to the cinema. Today's generation learned cinema by watching cinema and television. Previously, some people accepted cinema as a job but nowadays some people do not have cinematic jobs and make films only when they desire to say something. In political movements, some people use these cameras as journalists. They make short political documentaries.

In a certain period of time, the Iranian Youth Cinema Society made 4000 films, probably out of a total of 40,000 people who wanted to be film-makers. The desire of film-making for cinema is high, the desire to be an actor or film-maker. The Iranian Youth Cinema Society made a basis for learning. This is a generation who can talk. If they cannot make drama films, they make reports.

Iranian society has found a speaker who has broken the dominant voice. In the censorship atmosphere, first you apply self-censorship and then you see that there is no diversity of voices in the country. However, digital cinema generates diversity in voices and everybody presents his challenge in the visual world. When we see these in terms of pictures, we realise diversity in society.

Digital cinema brought freedom. I told Dr Soroush that you should use a camera and express yourself with it.

The time of being a technician has passed. A poet speaks poetry and it may spread in society more than before. It can be a problem as well. The previous elitism has diminished but freedom has increased and if somebody has some good points to make, you can hardly find them.

The sensibility of some festivals has declined because of the huge number of films. The same has occurred in graphics and music.

AR: Let's talk about producing; what were the first digital devices that you used in your company?

MM: In terms of first digital devices, first I brought a Hi-8 Sony camcorder from the USA and Samira and Hana made films with it.

When materials diminish, jobs terminate. A lot of people who enjoyed working in films, like being in heaven, lost their jobs. It was good for authors but it was not good for technicians. They suffered from an identity crisis: "What am I living for?" Where do these jobless people go after digital cinema? The cinema technicians lose their tempers after spending a week without jobs because they are not witnesses of creation.

There was political censorship in the East but this is changed now. There is speech but the volume of noise is so loud that your voice cannot be heard. This means that you say "so I made it, where can I show it?"

A kind of business is being generated again now: expensive digital cameras. Capitalism turns the game in another direction.

AR: What digital devices are you provided with to make a film financially? I mean, can you point to some figures concerning time, expenditure, crew etc. for your works, in order to show how digital camera has reduced the extra expenditure and crew and cast?

MM: I made *Salam Cinema* in 11 days with a 35mm camera, *Sib* by Samira as well. However, I made *Naserdin Shah* in 40 days and Hana made *Buddha* in 30 days. This means that time can be reduced but it is not necessary, because you

can work with obsession to reach a creative moment. You can reduce the crew from 30 to a few technicians. You can also do crowd scenes in actual places. But converting to 35mm is expensive. The wages are lower, cost of extras is lower etc, and you need less light as well. *Testing Democracy* had no costs apart from the cost of plane tickets, a few days in a hotel, the cost of extras ... it was around \$2000-3000. However, the conversion to 35mm cost around \$15,000. You can make a digital film using 20 or 30 per cent of a 35mm budget film if you do not need actors.

AR: Regarding editing, please describe the change in editing when digital editing was introduced in Iran.

MM: I edited twenty 35mm films. They usually took longer. The syncing took a long time. Editing took a long time as well. I did less testing. We could not compare. On the other hand, we did the editing and then worked on the sound. However, now we can complete a scene and then go on to the rest of them. Previously it was completed like a fetus. For example, I edited *Two-Legged Horse* in two months. But I edited *Dastfroosh* (3 episodes) in two weeks. However, digital is faster overall.

At a certain time, the cost of Resane Pooya was similar to negative but everything changed with Final Cut Pro. Digital editing has made some people jobless. Some editors could not learn to use computers and so they became redundant. Some of them used assistants. Iran can be updated easily in a few years because it has all the technicians.

AR: What kind of digital software has been more convenient for you over time?

MM: I was editing with Premier before Avid. I edited *Testing Democracy* and *Afghan Alphabet* with Premier. There was crack Avid in Resane Pooya and I bought an Avid later, until Final Cut was introduced, which we used thereafter. Avid was more professional than Premier. I prefer Final Cut.

AR: What was the first editing software that you discovered and when did you find it as a user?

MM: My first digital editing was *Rozi Ke Khalam Mariz Bood* (1376) directed by Hana, and I edited it by Premier.

AR: How do digital distribution and exhibitions affect your works?

MM: Some films are meant for the big screen and some are specially made for small exhibitions. The influence of sea on a big screen is different from that on a mobile screen. The influences of colours, forms and sound, where you work on the volume, are different. Only the story works on the small screen. For example, you can watch Ghobadi's film anywhere because it looks like a music video. However, in *Dar* (my film), a person carries a door and is walking in the desert until they become a point. So, if someone watches it on a mobile he sees the person as a point from the first moment, and he cannot feel the influence of the film.

The experience of watching a film with others is important. In the cinema you enter a big place where the screen is bigger than you, like entering a church. Some of the effect relates to the proportion of the screen and you. But you are bigger than a TV screen.

Therefore, these are the elements: 1) the size of the screen; 2) being in group focusing on a film (it is a kind of trophy); 3) the experience of others affects you. You test yourself in a group. Like religion.

I think digital offers the chance of private watching and making new literature but the idea of watching film in cinemas will continue. After starvation, the biggest problem of human beings is loneliness.

Digital has added something, meaning that it gives human beings more than it claims. The digital revolution gave us more than the Iranian revolution. The revolution closed Iran's door but digital opened it. The digital period is moving from one world to another. It is not just cinema; it is also in social networks but a lot of useless speeches are given as well. So, books are more trustworthy.

Some films cause disaster, such as some private films on the Internet that cause murder. Digital terminates privacy. It is a transparent period. We think about freedom but tolerance is not the same in different parts of the world; thus, digital puts people in danger. For example, think about instructions for making bombs on the Internet.

You eliminate all the borders from everything and turn humans into creatures who are completely knowledgeable. But this complete knowledge can provide facilities for distraction and abuse of others in the case of bad humans who are social climbers and love authority. Referring to Krishnamurti's idea, I am just wondering whether this volume of knowledge achieved by humans influences their health and peace or not. Kubrick said that humans suffer from excess knowledge more than ignorance. Extreme information brings extreme indifference because there is not enough time to react. Previously, we thought people knew and then had a revolution. But we have reached a period where people know and do nothing because the knowledge is no longer equal to liberation. I do not know what will happen in the end. Computers gave us a new view of ontology, like the Hubble Telescope. However, we are not more peaceful having achieved this knowledge. I see a kind of nihilism behind this new tool that changes the relations of capitalism, which may result in distraction of the world.

AR: What are your thoughts on digital exhibition?

MM: It is good and bad. It is good because everyone can see the films and bad because a work that should be watched in a certain way will be watched in another way and it will not have its intended influence.

AR: What about the black market?

MM: Some people have no choice but piracy. They do piracy and grab their share of knowledge. The world does not honour their human rights, so they do not abide by copyright laws.

AR: Your last word on digital?

MM: Cinematic knowledge increases and then there are better circumstances for those who are enthusiastic about this art. Also, the world is more updated with the latest cinematic products. Of course, some moral and social relations change with these changes. It is like containers that are connected to each other. This means that if you delete digital and communications, humans will think like they did in the past.

**Malakooti, Mehran. Pioneer in digital sound recording and digital sound designer. Interviewed on 14/03/2012 by Alireza Razazifar**

AR: When and how did digital sound recording begin in Iran? Did it change anything dramatically?

MM: In fact, I think digital came to Iran without Iran's knowledge. We work in a cinema where the economy is first priority. So they should know whether something is economical or not, then they approach it. Actually, producers thought that digitalisation meant the elimination of quarter-inch tape in cinema because that tape was expensive. So they pushed us towards digital recording. At first, we did not use professional devices. We used DAT which is not sufficient for recording sound on scenes because after a certain time it loses its synchronisation and we had to sync it in post-production, frame by frame. In the next step they started using mini HHP devices which recorded sound onto a floppy disc but this is not good for sound recording on scenes. I think Mr Samakbashi was the first to use DAT; I am not sure, maybe 15 years ago. In the next step, Farabi Foundation imported some professional sound recorders for sound recordists. They were Aton and these new HHP devices. But in cinema all things are related to one another. This means that if we record sound digitally, then there are other issues like preparing optical sounds and recording in the laboratory, and so on. At the moment, the encode and decode devices and the analogue devices that are being used are out of date in European countries. It means that our optics are analogue. I would say that the introduction of digital was a good thing for Iranian cinema because we were released from the previous situation, but it is not perfect for us. One of our problems with directors is that they appreciate our work on scenes but they do like the sound exhibited in cinema. Analogue post-production films have less quality, by twenty per cent. This means devices are only partially introduced and technical knowledge was not introduced. Thus, sound recordists work with new devices with old techniques and methods and some of them work based on trial and error. We had some recordists who thought that we should record sound at a low level because it is digital and we can change it in post-production. Even in digital studios, everything is limited to a PC and fake software. But we do not have its plug-ins. Thus, everything is partial.



AR: Why did picture develop more than sound?

MM: It is because they do not understand the importance of sound. A producer once told me: “the difference between you as a high-quality professional sound recordist and an ordinary sound recordist is ten per cent; therefore, considering your price I prefer to work with the ordinary one”.

AR: What about other aspects?

MM: The bad thing was ... because they all had music track devices, so they felt that sound recording is very easy. They can give every actor an HF device and cover all scenes with booms as well, and finally you see all these kinds of sound recordists recording on 6-7 tracks but almost none of them are useful. When I and other sound recordists worked with Nagra, we knew that we had two tracks so we had to use all our experience and knowledge in order to record the ideal sound. However, no one thinks about any shots thanks to multi-track devices now. Thus, I think the quality of sound is not good now because they are not serious like before and they think usage of HF has solved the problems.

AR: Can you say about the chronology of replacing devices again?

MM: I do not remember the dates. After the 4/2 Nagra, Stereo Nagra was introduced. Then there was DAT, which did not have a time code counter and recorded on 16 bit. I think a kind of mini HHP was introduced and it recorded on floppy discs; it was good for sound effects and ambient sound but they used it for recording sound in feature films. But those were not successful. Then Farabi introduced these professional digital devices. That was the right step. These are Aton and professional HHP. They gave these to sound recordists by using Note-3 governmental loans. At a certain time Digital Nagra (Nagra 4) was introduced but it had some problems. Finally, the new Nagra was introduced.

AR: When and how did digital sound editing begin?

MM: I think Masoud Behnam was the first one in this regard. It was the Akai DD 1500 which was matched with the analogue editing desk. But the new devices were introduced very fast and people could use them on PCs and with a kind of sound editing software.

AR: Do you like the digital editing software and do you prefer it to previous methods? Why?

MM: Working with this is very easy. With the old method, we just heard tracks but now we put 100-150 tracks together and we can hear them. It has very good capability compared to the old method. If we still had the old methods (analogue method), I would not be attracted to sound editing. It was a hard job and it required strange experience. At the time of mixing, they put 8 bonds on a Rock and Roll device, so in the event of any mistakes they had to start everything from the beginning. They mixed 8 and then they went on to mix another 8 bonds and so on. That was very hard and strange for me.

AR: So you answered another question of mine about the attraction for non-experts.

MM: Yes, this is interesting. Let's come. Maybe at the beginning everybody can work but those who like it can stay in this profession. I believe all people can work in this profession but you should see who will stay and it relates to his essence and personality; the passage of time reveals this.

**Meschi, Majid. General Manager of Cinema Shahr, technological management of digitalizing Iranian cinema. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 19/04/2014**

AR: What have you done in recent years in terms of digital exhibition?

MM: In fact, exhibition has been changing from 35mm to digital. However, this digitalisation should not be compared with Western countries because of our financial limitations, limitations on exhibiting foreign films, income from cinema theatres and their potential to buy and retain equipment. It is 95 per cent different from the West. Of course, they had our problems. So we adopted the Indian pattern for digital exhibition. This means we adopted the E-Cinema system for most of our cinemas. It has MPEG compression and an E-Cinema server. Also, there is a certain range for the projectors in this system depending on the size of the cinema theatre and the number of spectators. It has an HD projector and SD projector. We were concerned about the method of encryption

and security as well. This cinema does not have SMPT and DSPI standard. E-Cinema is a simulation of D-Cinema. It is about the method of encryption and production of KDM and other issues. Even in terms of connections, the server connection to the projector should be safe. For example, we have Cine-Link in D-Cinema and here we have HDCP. Anyway, they are similar to each other. We used D-Cinema in some cinemas but in most of them we used E-Cinema. It was our policy at the beginning of the work because a lot of cinema theatres do not have 35mm copies of films and it would end up with the closure of cinema theatres. So we started equipping them with E-Cinema and then we equipped larger cinema theatres with D-Cinema servers as well. Of course, the HD system is used in Europe for showing commercials but here it is not so bad for film exhibition. We may show films in the morning by E-Cinema and at night with bigger audiences we use D-Cinema.

We still show 35mm films in Mashhad if we have 35mm copies for economic reason. In terms of quality, as the most of the screens in current cinemas are small, we get acceptable quality. On the other hand, we have no DCP of foreign films in Iran. We have almost no foreign film exhibition. Even if we had, the film would be shown under the subtitle process or dubbing. So we would have to decrypt it for that process to obtain an E-Cinema copy of it.

In India there are some cinemas that show only Indian films, so they have E-Cinema system. But the cinema theatres that exhibit foreign films have D-Cinema system and the cost of tickets is different. But we do not have foreign films. This is our general pattern. We have different projectors depending on the size of the screening room. SD projectors are good for some towns. They are better than the previous situation for those cinema theatres because the projectors were not good and the pictures were worse. It became completely better. We have been running Festivals in digital for two years.

AR: Would you please mention the dates?

MM: The Festivals (Fajr and Children) were digital in 1391 and 1392. I think the Children's Festival was digital in 1390 as well. During these years, some cinema theatres digitalised but they showed 35mm as well. Almost all the 35mm copies have been uneconomical since the middle of 1392. In fact, since the summer of 2013, making 35 mm copies was not economical for producers and

distribution companies. The cost of print and raw materials for 35mm copies is around four million Tooman now. This means that if the box office achieves ten million Tooman it can only just cover the cost of the copy and raw material, which is impossible in 90 per cent of cinemas in small cities. This means a film ticket can be sold for one million Tooman in total. Therefore, they used the old (second-hand) copies for these kinds of cinemas; these kinds of copies circulated in cities and as a result these cities show the film three months after Tehran.

Digitalisation has accelerated since the summer of 1392 and has proceeded even faster in the second part of the year. The Festival also had some exhibitions in big cities (state centres) so we must have fully equipped cinema theatres in the centre of each state of the country. We have 320 active cinemas, 210 of which are digitalized in terms of exhibition. Now we have 210 equipped cinemas. The rest of them will be digitalised in the next few months. We saw the effect of this in the Eid release period. For the first time in six years, a film was more successful in other cities than in Tehran in terms of box office. In previous years it was half. This means that if a film sold around 100 million Tooman in Tehran, it sold 50 million in other cities. However, *Merajihaa* by Dehnamaki sold 1.5 milliards in Tehran and 2.5 milliards in other cities. This means the cinema theatres are increasing without the extra costs of exhibition.

AR: The number of cinemas increased?

MM: I mean the number of cinemas that can exhibit a certain film. For example, that film was shown in 100 screening rooms. On the 35mm scale, it means 400 million Tooman for extra copies, which no distributor can afford.

We are investigating whether to equip some cinema theatres with D-Cinema in big cities but if we have good projectors in the case of 12-meter screens, in non-action movies E-Cinema and D-Cinema do not show much difference. Also there is a financial issue in the case of server and projectors. Another issue with D-Cinema is the sanctions. This means there are three companies that make projectors and they did not sell to Iran. Also, the maintenance cost is high. We have a D-Cinema in Mashhad. Each year it requires three lamps that cost 2000 Euros. This means a cinema theatre with five screening rooms must pay 10 million Tooman just for lamps, while it is 10 million Tooman for E-Cinema. The

cinema theatres cannot afford such high costs. It is a constant regular cost regardless of whether there are two spectators or 100. There are some critics in Iran who discuss some technological issues and say we should have D-Cinema like in Europe. But this is on paper and is not practical.

We definitely made the right decision and time proves it. Even the spectator in practice prefers brighter SD projector to less bright HD projector. In terms of recognition (of quality of picture), brightness is more important for the spectator than resolution.

AR: Do you do field research?

MM: Yes, and as a result we invested our money in brightness of projectors. This is our overall view of this subject.

AR: When did the government start to equip cinemas with surround sound?

MM: There are some issues with sound. We had some cinema theatres that had the Dolby system for 35mm but we did not have serious problems with them. The first Dolby system goes back 20 years to Cinema Farhang. That was unique. Since 1382 digitalisation of sound has gradually developed. We used the Dolby Digital system to equip all refurbished cinema theatres and all cinema theatres built by the municipality in Tehran and even in other cities. At least, we used this system in the biggest screening room of each cinema theatre. So we have 120 cinemas that we can adapt to digital exhibition by using a convertor of the previous system. A Dolby Processor cost \$12000 but a convertor is around \$1000. Of course, the new cinema theatres did not need processors and convertors and they are digital. The cinemas that do not have the Dolby System come in three categories. One group is equipped with digital surround sound in the process of digitalising the picture. In some others we changed and refurbished the old mono or stereo system by changing the speakers, but we did not change the others at all. It depended on the importance of the cinema theatre.

Five years ago, we paid for films for 4.1 mixing and they were used in home cinema exhibition. Then they could be exhibited in Dolby SR for cinemas. We could not use Dolby Digital because Dolby did not sell their licence to Iran but some big budget films were taken abroad (France) and mixed with their Dolby

Digital 5.1 method. However, nowadays everyone can mix 6 channels even on a laptop and you can put a lot of sound into several channels of DCP. We did not need the Dolby encoder and decoder. So, in this case we should say that the quality of sound has improved. We no longer have limitations. The most important problem is lack of experience. Our sound editors do not have experience of film sound atmosphere. Also, our directors either lack experience or do not like it. The themes of films do not show the difference between mono and 6-channel sound. There is a kind of family film. A wife and a husband shout at each other. Anyway, it is much better than six years ago and they have gained experience.

AR: Can you summarise digitalisation in the realm of pictures and sound and mention relevant dates?

MM: As for pictures, it started two years ago, in the summer of 1391. In fact it was newly starting. Then two festivals passed. It was around two years. But six months ago the serious period started. The first systems were not switched on for a year because they had enough 35mm copies for exhibition. Most of the films were recorded on 35mm two years ago and they should have spent around 30 million Toman on scanning and DCP, which was not economical for exhibiting in a few cinemas. Two things have happened since 1392. Firstly, most production has gone digital, so converting it to 35mm requires extra cost. Secondly, the number of cinemas with digital exhibition capability increased. So, it became cost-effective. This Eid was the peak of this process. This means that some films did not have 35mm copies. This happened simultaneously. As for sound, it was sooner. Since 1383 every cinema theatre has been built with surround sound.

AR: So there was a relationship between new cinema theatres and sound?

MM: Yes, and refurbished cinemas. It means we equipped refurbished cinemas with Dolby. Of course, we did not change the old cinemas with broken seats.

AR: When will all Iranian cinemas be fitted with Dolby Digital?

MM: Maybe never, when all of them have been refurbished. It is the same everywhere. There were 3000 cinemas in the USA that had old-fashioned projectors in 2010. As some cinema theatres are about to shut down, the

changes are not cost-effective. We have a special policy to use the most facilities. For example, in a very old and uncomfortable cinema theatre we just use SD projector and change some speakers, because the old cinemas need more factors to change such as seats, air-conditioning and rest rooms.

AR: Do you want to make cinemas smaller and like home cinemas?

MM: It is not our policy

AR: Do you have any plans for IMAX or other kinds of cinemas?

MM: We had two problems with IMAX. Firstly with the licence and secondly I think it is not doable economically for Iran.

AR: What about 3D?

MM: The cinema theatres that had D-Cinema can show 3D movies. A 3D film named *Aghaye Alef* was made in 1391 and was not successful. I do not believe in 3D in Iran. Anyway, in fact we do not have 3D production.

AR: I have interviewed some directors and they think we are going to have more small and private cinema theatres for more artistic films. They are talking about smaller and simpler cinemas.

MM: There are some ideas. For example, Tehran municipality has plans for small local cinema theatres but they are not feasible. In fact, the cinema theatre with one screen will not be able to survive. So, if we have multiplexes we can decide about size and number of screens. Of course, there is a logic to multiplex cinemas. They have small and big screens and another issue concerns the number of seats in each screening room. But it will be not feasible if we prepare a screening room in an alley for showing films. Any cinema needs people to take care of it. We have a cinema industry that has not been in a good situation. We should help it to survive. The cinemas with one screen give no choice or option to the audience. They are not economical. If we make it local it gets worse.

AR: What will happen in future to Iranian cinema?

MM: Digitalisation has reduced the costs of production and exhibition. Low cost gives the cinema a chance of survival. However, the Iranian cinema is unique in

the world because we produce a lot of films and we do not show any foreign films. If we repeated this pattern in any other country the cinema theatres would shut down. So, we have a unique phenomenon and the future is in our own hands; for example, governmental support and so on. But we do not imitate what happens in Eastern Europe or elsewhere. The cinema situation is partly related to Iranian TV as well. For example, in New Year Eid we had good box office takings because TV did not have very good programs. When they banned satellites, the box office was good.

AR: Is there any research about the relation between box office and censorship?

MM: There are some factors in this regard. For example, if you want to watch a film in a cinema in the USA you must pay \$8 but if you want to watch it in your home you must wait six weeks and then pay \$20-25 for a DVD. However, In Iran you pay 6000 Toman for a cinema ticket but after two months you can buy a DVD of the film for 1500 Toman. This means that home video is ruining the box office. This is just the legal part and we have not even discussed the black market. Iranian TV shows newly-released Hollywood movies for free and it harms the Iranian film industry.

**Mirtahmasb, Mojtaba. Digital film-maker, board manager of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers Society. Interviewed on 08/08/2012 by Alireza Razazifar**

AR: What is your attitude to digital cinema and in particular digital documentaries? (Please mention your views on digital cameras, mini digital cameras, and the editing and digital format for distribution through the Internet or DVD)

MM: I have been working since the negative era. Digital was generated based on our demand and it has its effects. I started with PD100 and PD150. We were unconsciously comparing negative with digital at that time. This was partly out of habit but the license was also an issue. We told ourselves that even if it has 20 per cent less quality, at least we are freer. My first digital documentary was in 1379. I refer to the article by Makhmalbaf on digital cinema.



There was a show time in cinema – tek - in 1376-1375. They exhibited a lot of documentaries. The Documentary Filmmakers' Society arranged these events. Through these I discovered the work of Rus Michelvi, an American film-maker who makes films on his own in 16mm negative. All his films have narratives, in particular his trilogy. So, technology does not go beyond our demand. Technology is generated by our demand and digital cinema was created. When we found digital we enjoyed it.

In the 1370s the most important work was *Kodakane Sarzamine Man*, which focuses on rural areas because it could not have been made in a city. However, everything became possible with digital cameras and we could work on previous plots. I mean that there was a demand for digital cameras before their introduction.

In Iran you must ask for permission before starting work. We needed governmental facilities but we do not need them now. We knew about that special kind of film-making but we could not do it. We had a subject but we could not work on it and the time passed.

Also, some journalists have come to journalism with digital cameras and so we do not leave subjects behind.

For a journalist the first thing is the subject followed by the aesthetics. Of course, some people make sloppy work and forget aesthetics.

Of course, we are in an exciting period of producing digital documentaries. We face a huge number of productions. Without considering TV and some unknown organisations, 1500-2000 digital documentaries are made every year. These are 2011 statistics. 70 per cent of the film-makers involved in documentary film festivals are director-producers. The Documentary Centre accounted for 10 per cent of the output and the municipality had the same participation. There was excitement but not many good films.

Mr Tahaminejad said that, in the pre-digital era, if you wanted to make a film about Bashagard, you had to find a producer, do some research and present it, find some facilities, and then go and make the film. Nowadays, Bashagard has four native film-makers.

Do not forget, we are not cameras, we must be cinematographers; we must be sound recordists, not microphones. Maybe some people think this makes cinema complicated but it is our idea that comes from negatives.

I made a film named *Tambr* for the Post Company which was a professional film made by digital camera. But I made *Roodkhane Hanooz Mahi Darad* about Dr Ahmad Nadalian, a painter, in 1380. It was made in the digital film-making culture. I did the filming in nine sessions and I used a cinematographer and a sound recordist. I used pre-digital methods in part and I researched for three months.

AR: Let's talk about the Documentary Filmmakers Society.

MM: The 1380s was the decade of flourishing documentary cinema in terms of quantity and quality. Of course, there was a golden time for analogue documentaries in the first half of the 1370s. There were cuts in 83-84 and 1388. The most submissions to the Society occurred between 1384 and 1388. It had 150 members in 1384 but in 1389 it has around 400 members. The new generation has arrived.

Living costs had not been important for those working in documentary cinema previously. Our old generation comprised government staff or retired people. But I think it could provide a way of living since digitalisation. Previously no one choose documentaries except as a way towards drama film-making. But it is a course now. As for the Society's workshops, 140 students enrolled in 1384 and 20 students were selected. Then it continued and was supported. The Teaching Institute established a documentary department. Previously everybody wanted to direct drama films but some of them are saying "we want to make a documentary and become documentary film-makers" now. Saied Dashtian said: "There are some young folks who are living by making documentary films and this serious attitude to documentaries is a result of the Society's efforts. The Documentary Film-makers Society was the best Society for three years in a row.

Before the digital era, most of the films were about war, Jihad Sazandegi, Ashoura but, finally, social documentaries arrived. We tried to open up the red lines a little bit. Sometimes we made films with M9000 S-VHS. Rakhshan Bani-

Etemad made a film with that camera. In the existing situation, if somebody does not make a film, it is his own fault and there are no external obstacles.

AR: Regarding editing, do you remember anything about the early days of digital editing?

MM: I was among the first editors to use computers in 1374. There were two graphics companies in Tehran using computers to do editing. I made a documentary series by video in 1376 and took it to Jafar Fatemi. There was software named ADL that converted Beta-Cam to VHS with time code. We selected from the rushes on VHS. They captured that part in low resolution. Then they edited it briefly. *Sarenakh* (by Poorahmad TV series) was edited there. Makhmalbaf went there later.

AR: Let's talk about *This Is Not a Film*; could you tell me more about that film?

MM: This was a micro budget film. It cost 3000 Euros, which was the cost of post-production, colour grading, sound, translation and subtitling. It was one of the ten selected films of *Sight and Sound* and also the most important home video in cinema history.

Jafar had not made a film for years. I had been unable to make films since 1388. The film was made in four days. It has the energy of four years. It was like an Iranian music improvisation. We made it with [Sony] Z1 used for filming *Offside* and *iPhone*. We used existing facilities. So there was some over-lighting and under-lighting.

I had an idea about making a film about the life of a film-maker who did not make films. We must have recorded it. I was working on it. I had an idea about recording a day in the life of a film-maker on his own. Jafar had done it. He recorded a few shots of himself. I was not satisfied. I told him: "Tell me about the film that you wanted to make". We started to film this but we saw that it did not work. So we finished the film and left. The day after, I returned. When we made the film we worked for three days. I was worried about my son. So we made a plan based on the possibility: "what will happen if I leave". In the last 17 minutes of the film there are two shots and we filmed it in one take. We were surprised when it became a film.

Mr Sanati, in my documentary *Banooye Gole Sorkh*, said that our problems are our capital. I believe this is true. This film is the life of cinema after the events of 1388 which made our cultural atmosphere political. Those who did not watch the film thought it was a report about Jafar Panahi, but after watching it they all agreed that it is a film.

AR: A final point?

MM: The resistance to digital was partly related to its resolution on screen. But there are no screens anymore and home cinema is more favoured. The exhibition transferred to digital as well. DJ Burma was made by mobile footage which people took in 1388. That film has low quality picture but it is cinema.

**Mokhtari, Ibrahim. Master film-maker, founder and board manager of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers Society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 19/03/2012.**

AR: When was digital cinema introduced in Iran? And what happened to documentary filmmaking?

IM: Documentary cinema developed in a governmental organisation thanks to the dictatorship in Iran. At first, it was the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Art and Television, because negatives were expensive, there was no place for exhibition, and there was censorship. Cameras were taken onto the streets with the revolution. After the revolution the structures did not change, everything became governmental and TV lost its freedom again. Of course, the digital revolution terminated the government's domination of documentary film-making.

The whole country became a real-world subject for documentary film-makers. Documentary film-making has history in Iran. A lot of short films had documentary subjects with a dramatic approach. TV was interested in running festivals and these films went from one festival to another. In fact, this kind of documentary cinema promotes documentary film-making.

AR: Would you tell me about digital and your experience more specifically?

IM: I worked on two subjects that I could not have done with negatives. I made *Mokarame* and *Yek Rooze Bekhosoos Zinat* by video. I could not say that, if digital did not exist, (for example) a person would not be a film-maker. It is like the difference between two languages. We can think about a certain subject in a certain way. I could not think about them with celluloid logic.

The real event is sacred for me. I faced it in *Ejareneshini*. The pioneer of digital documentary in TV was *Ejareneshi*. We had the advantage of governmental investment in favour of the elimination of the limitations of negatives. We said: "If you want us to demonstrate the reality to managers in government, you should give us freedom in two things". These were, first, consuming negatives and then approaching some taboos. This happened because the government needed that film. We decided to disarm the conservative who says "this is film, so this is unreal". We had to say "this is real". So the event was sacred for me, there.

Our approach should be pure documentary film-making in a way that no one can deny it. At that time there was video but there was a lot of 16mm negative, so we agreed to work with negative. I worked with it as with digital.

We approached some new subjects thanks to digital.

I filmed *Zinat* by Beta-cam camera. I made *Balooch* with negative before that. We inherited drama cinema traditionally. I felt that I enjoyed parts of the film and did not enjoy other parts. I found out that I had a dramatic approach in some parts and I changed my approach to hunting for a real moment as a live and independent event. I recognised that event as something amazing. We should have not changed it in favour of our idea. I mean, you are an artist if you can admit the independence of that event and investigate the aesthetic within it and then record it. This means the creative process is very complicated in documentary cinema.

AR: Could you tell me about your attitude to the negative effects of digital?

IM: This happened to photography when cameras became abundant. So, people found out that photographers are important. I am not worried. I wanted to make a film from Pahlavani. I realised I could not. Recently, I realised how to do it and I will make it. The camera is the last thing you should take, the last

thing. Sometimes you take a photo for yourself; sometimes you take a photo which passes you by becoming meaningful for others. It is the same in cinema. Sometimes amateurs make impressive films. Equipment is public but some work may be meaningful for others. It is like a pen and a writer. Cinema pictures have reached that level. A lot of people are tempted and deceived.

AR: Let's talk about the new generation and The Filmmakers Society!

IM: We have 300 members but lots of people have applied. We assess them based on art and techniques. The Society was established in 1376. The first digital cameras arrived in 1378. In the second Kish Documentary Film Festival, only Ms Karkheiran had worked with digital cameras. I had worked with Hi-8.

I reproduced reality with celluloid. People approached reality after digital but I realised the importance of reality and forced celluloid to act like digital. So I do not give priority to equipment. When I recognise that an event is happening somewhere I record it completely like part of a story, even if we recognise that it was useless for film.

AR: What was the first digital camera you used?

IM: Sony PD 100. I made a report on Shirin Ebadi at the airport. Of course Beta-Cam worked for me like digital.

**Mostafavi, Youssef. Merchant, pioneer in digital camera trading.  
Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 23/08/2012**

AR: When did you sell your first digital camera? What was it? Who bought it?

IM: I bought and imported the first Sony digital camera from Singapore, the PD 100 Sony, around 1365. At the same time there was a Panasonic camera, but Iranians mostly used Sony because IRIB works with this brand. No one had his tape and everyone denied it. Then we imported some non-linear editing boards. I believe the first productions with digital cameras and equipment were made in Iran. Of course, the Soroush Company imported the audio-visual equipment before the sanctions, but after the sanctions they could no longer do so.

AR: Who used this new equipment?

IM: Private film-making companies.

AR: When did the digital camera become popular, which were the most popular and which of them were bought by professionals?

IM: In Iran, if new technologies arrive, they replace the old ones very rapidly despite other parts of the world. All old cameras were replaced by new ones within six months. No one believes in old cameras, even for wedding ceremonies. In less than one year, 80 per cent of private companies were using new digital equipment because we sold our goods incredibly fast.

AR: When did you sell your first digital editing software?

IM: We left those products aside. We focused on cameras. Because we have a handful of academic editors, most of them work based on their experience. In Iran seventy per cent of users used just thirty per cent of the capability of these boards.

AR: Which cameras were more popular (among those you imported)?

IM: PD 200 and PD 250 were good and PD 150 was very good. Panasonic 100 and 150 are very good as well. We sold around 1000 of them.

AR: Were you the first importer of digital cameras?

IM: I cannot claim this. Mr Soori imported digital cameras as well. Maybe he imported digital cameras sooner than me because he focused solely on cameras, but we have a broad range of imports. Maybe he sold his cameras earlier than me.

AR: Were you and Mr Soori pioneers?

IM: Yes, at that time we were both very active in this field.

AR: When exactly was the first camera imported and can you say how many of them were sold?

IM: After a while there were a lot of merchants importing and selling this equipment. I cannot say how many. But in the first year there were just two or three companies. In the first year we may have sold 150 cameras in total, PD

200 and PD 250. The 100 was replaced by the 200 very rapidly; in turn, this was replaced by the PD 250 in maybe less than a year.

**Motamedi, Amirreza. Pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 17/08/2013**

AR: Please could you explain the history of digital visual effects in Iran?

AM: I mention this on my website. The first digital visual effect was in the *Mohakeme* TV series. We had one shot in *Man Zamin Ra Doost Daram* and one shot in the *Emam Ali* TV series which both worked in Hoze Honari. There was a scanner and they scanned a frame manually and then optically printed it. However, in *Mhakemeh* we have 100 minutes of visual effects. We worked with Adobe software and used 3D with Light View but all of them were video. *Eshghe Film* was the first film and had 3.5 minutes of visual effects. They took the negative to Poland and did scanning with HD resolution. Then they recorded by Saba recorder. They also used a Saba film scanner. *Tapesh* worked in Studio Badi. *13 Gorbah Rooye Shirvani* had 13 minutes of visual effects. There were 65 minutes of visual effects in *Hazrate Yousef*. Also, they used photorealistic animation there. This was the first time that they presented the religious imagination by using animation in cinema. There were 110 minutes of visual effects in *Dar Cheshme Baad*.

*Kingdom of Solomon* was taken abroad. Chroma key and designs were good but the animation was not good. The visual design was wrong. The story was about religious events but the design had no trace of religion.

*Rahe Abrisham Abi* had 102 shots of visual effects but they used a laboratory abroad. It was converted to DI in Technicolor, in Bangkok. Finally, there were 95 shots of visual effects in the film. *33 Days* was filmed in Lebanon and had photorealistic animation and 23 minutes and 398 shots of visual effects. It has the most visual effects in terms of time.

AR: What do you think about the future of digital visual effects in Iran?

AM: Iran does not have an economical (industrial) cinema and it does not produce income. It looks like Iranian Television. The income of Iranian



cinematic jobs comes from producing films, not from the box office. *Kingdom of Solomon* cost 5.5 milliards Tooman and achieved 1.3 milliards at the box office. *Raa Abi Abrisham* took just 300 million Tooman.

As visual effects are more expensive, they should produce three times the benefit for films. So, the approach to visual effects in Iran is not economical. Thus, they use visual effects in Iran for two reasons; doing things that are impossible without visual effects, and then reducing and accelerating the process. The big projects in Iran are produced by IRIB. Potentially we can develop like Europe. The investment in visual effects is not economical. But we have improved our technological knowledge because of TV industry demand. Sometimes, experience is gained in certain projects. In fact, the digital cinema industry reduces costs and accelerates the process, so maybe Iran is attracted to it but not like Hollywood.

**Pooresmaeili, Saeid. Film-maker, board manager of the Iranian Short Films Society, DOP. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 27/09/2012**

AR: In which conditions and circumstances do you prefer using digital cameras?

MP: In terms of picture aesthetics, negative has more influence but digital prepares more facilities in terms of technology, if we want to convert it to 35mm at the end. Digital cameras have a lot of good things such as the light sensibility, for example in the case of a light position and inside a car. For instance, in *Offside* Kalari could not work easily with a 35mm camera in a minibus without lighting. So light is a priority. The next priority is mobility. Of course, we have small 35mm cameras in Iran but digital is more comfortable. In terms of realism, I think digital gives us a more realistic atmosphere because of its mobility. It means we can film in existing circumstances but we must provide (for example) lighting in 35mm filming. Also, the camera does not attract people's attention in natural locations. When I work in primary schools with this camera children are more natural. Thus, Kiarostami likes this camera. The next issue is post-production. I should know how much I want to work on a film in post-production. There are a lot of digital facilities in post-production. You can film and then change the colour.

I have worked with most video and digital cameras. But most of my work has been with XD-Cam X3 because it is a good choice here.

Digital cameras facilitate the production of an image but they generate chaos as well. This means negatives give you more aesthetic opportunities than digital. Of course, the chance to use more takes is very good in digital. I rarely find cinematographers who get good aesthetic results from this camera. Negatives give one more opportunity to think about aesthetics than digital film.

The quantity of cinematographers has increased, thereby threatening the art and our profession as well, in particular in terms of low-budget films and low-level works.

AR: Let's talk about the Short Films Society; to what extent does digital cinema make some of them film-makers?

MP: I was on the managing board of the Short Films Society for several years. I would say it has a very big influence. I think short films are not the consequence of the equipment. They are the consequence of thoughts and ideas. For example, there is a school for journalism but people reported the news in 1388. No one thought that social networks could do that. It is the same in short films. A person learns to work with equipment in order to demonstrate his ideas. Therefore, if the equipment is cheap and easy to use, short film production will be more popular. It is not necessarily good. In this sense, anybody with a camera and a computer can start to make films. But there is a positive point; it gives a person who has good ideas an opportunity to make his own film with just brief training. A lot of people claimed "we are film-makers" but they do not have knowledge. This claim ruins them and their ideas. It is like reciting poetry. You can get a PhD in literature for reciting poetry. Generally, I think there are more negative aspects. Some are called film-makers but they do not know about visual communication. This means the thing that's known as a short film is damaged by digitalisation.

Previously, we had Kianoosh Ayari, Abdollah Bakide and Naser Gholamrezaei as the outputs of Cinema Azad. They worked in very hard situations. For example, there was a super8 projector in Isfahan for exhibition; then it went to Ahvaz for sound editing of another film. However, they made brilliant films. The

16mm and 35mm films were expensive so they worked on scenes very carefully. They had no funds or public exhibition but they abided by the rules of short films, narrative structure and so on. I think that only a third of film-makers who use digital cameras have complete knowledge of these devices.

Without digital cameras, I am just wondering whether some good existing film-maker might have made good short films or not? For example, Shahram Mokri could not have made *Parvaze Sanjaghakha* without digital equipment and viewing. At least, it needed a high budget. Digital cameras provide him with this facility to use one-take shots without lighting. Also, Atefeh Khademoreza used this device very well. So some film-makers were brought up with digital.

**Razavian, Shahab. Film director, founder and board manager of the Iranian Short Films Society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 17/03/2012**

AR: When was digital cinema introduced in Iran?

SR: Digital cinema needed a basis and infrastructure in Iran. It did not happen without social, cultural and economic infrastructures. Cultural affairs develop gradually. We had the infrastructure for short films called Cinema Azad in 1348. Then the 8mm camera was introduced and the Youth Cinema Society was established in 1353. Then a centre for film was established in Kanoon Parvaresh Fekri at the same time. In fact there was a centre for film-making in libraries. The equipment gradually became cheaper and easier to obtain. In the next step, young people made films and a new generation was brought up. There was support. In the 1360s, this generation entered cinema. Cinema Azad was re-established in 1358. The infrastructure does exist. Those who could not enter the cinema because of its commercial culture entered Cinema Azad instead. The Ministry of Culture decided to generate infrastructure, so they established Youth Cinema offices in other towns in 1362. We have 60 offices now. They imported equipment and material as well. They also established the Baghe Ferdoos teaching cinema centre, and the alumni became teachers of Youth Cinema. We became film-makers because of that wise decision in cultural policy.

There were 8mm, then 16mm, and then 35mm cameras. Video cameras were introduced to Youth Cinema in the early 1370s. 8mm declined in the late 1380s and was replaced by video. Video was completely different, producing different worries and knowledge. It was not so easy but not too hard. The first digital cameras arrived in the late 1370s. The dependence on expensive governmental equipment decreased. When digital arrived, government domination weakened. Previously, 500-1000 films were made each year. Nowadays 4000-8000 films are submitted to the Short Films Festival and this is just half of the production. Just ten per cent of them use governmental financial support. These are the consequences of the infrastructure. Digital caused development. Although it has made film-making a less serious process, good film-makers will be born.

It generates non-governmental independent cinema and the government does not know about it. The government just controls the famous film-makers but underground film-makers do their own work. Government does not update people's tastes. There are some films such as *Bikhod Va Bijahat* by Kahani that are made by X3 and they are very attractive. The introduction of digital was very valuable for the Iranian cinema. The only problem is investment. The people who invest in projects run out of money within a year and then have to provide services for other projects to run their business. Of course, a lot of these service-provider offices are successful.

AR: Let's talk about the Short Films Society; do you think there is an emerging new generation of film-makers due to digital devices? To what extent does digital cinema make them film-makers?

SR: We have this problem in all parts of cinema. Short films have become cheap but the advantages of digital cinema outweigh the disadvantages. For example, a young film-maker made a film about an Iranian bat. In the negative era, we could not have made it. Although it causes some negligence, it compensates in other ways.

I know some film-makers who would not be film-makers without digital cinema. Ramtin Labafi made his first film in digital. Shahram Mokri has never touched celluloid. Kahani could not have made his last film so easily without digital. Majid Barzegar made his film in digital.

Digital helps cinema in closed societies. The biggest advantage of digital is its generation of independent cinema. Iranian cinema would have been monopolised by a certain group had digital cinema not existed. It is monopoly in terms of exhibition. If young people can exhibit their films with digital projections around the city, the problem of exhibition will be solved. If the government interferes only in film classification, the cinema will develop.

The big-budget projects do not facilitate cultural development or cinematic development. These projects are beyond Iranian cinema's capacity and cause bankruptcy. They spent four milliards Toomans on one film while we can make several with 200 million Toomans from that fund.

I was secretary of the founding board of the Short Films Society and I was also on the Managing Board. I made my first short film in 1359 and I have been teaching, directing and editing for 12 years.

**Rezadad, Alireza. Producer and former head of Farabi Cinematic Foundation and High Councillor of the Organization of Iranian Cinema. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 02/05/2012**

AR: What was the basis of digital cinema in Iran?

RA: We can track digital from the introduction of portable video systems in Iran and its consequences for TV productions and news reports in the 1360s. IRIB used negative 16mm cameras for news reports. This kind of reporting by negatives caused a delay in reporting news. This meant that, in the Iran-Iraq war, the visual news suffered a 24- or 48-hour delay. So, radio had more importance because of this delay. Then portable videos increased the speed of reporting at that time. The front line of the war covered around 1000 km, and TV should have covered the news. There were two options: buying more 16 mm cameras or buying U-Matic video, although they have low resolution compared to negatives. They decided to buy U-Matic. This simpler system gradually replaced the more complicated 16mm system. The video facilities encouraged TV producers to use video. Then Beta-Cam replaced U-Matic. So, documentary film-makers were encouraged to use video although video resolution was not sufficient for the big screen, as they needed more raw materials.

AR: When was digital cinema introduced in Iran?

RA: In the Persian Gulf War; some film-making equipment was produced globally which was an opportunity for Iran. A lot of journalists who came to the region to cover the war had small packages, small cameras that were neither for broadcasts nor for home videos. They were professional or semi-professional cameras. This equipment remained in the region because they were not worth taking back or because there were some requests for those cameras here. So, working with small cameras became standard in Iran in the 1370s and created a film-making movement.

AR: You mean, they came to Iran and introduced cameras to Iran?

RA: No, they did not come to Iran. The equipment was smuggled across the Iraq border. They worked in Iraq and the equipment came to Iran via Iraq and Kurdistan. I personally bought a PC7 Sony at that time. It was a kind of Palm-Cam and it looked like a second-hand camera used by some Western journalists. At the same time, the Soroush Company imported some cameras, and the Note-3 governmental loan was very important in this regard.

From 1372-3, the number of productions of IRIB increased and they had two options: expanding IRIB and its personnel or using the private sector. They chose the second solution but the private sector does not have enough equipment. There were sources of governmental funding in cinema called Note-3 loans (low-interest loans) for film production. Thus, these loans helped the private film companies buy equipment. Soroush and the Canon Company imported a range of cameras (small and large) for the second wave of film-making (film-making with digital videos). Thus, the film-making companies could buy cameras instead of renting them, as they were now cheap. In fact, this second wave was related to the development of TV production in IRIB.

AR: Are Note-3 loans available now?

RA: No, they were available until 1377 when the cost of equipment reduced and there was a glut in the market.

AR: What about digital cinema equipment?

RA: We moved to cinema in the 1380s. We did two things. First, we prepared the facility for converting video to film. Before then, there was a unique device in IRIB which only supported TV production. Farabi Cinematic foundation bought a conversion system (film recorder). We made a contract with a private-sector operator (Mr Behnam). He could manage the system in his studio. Thus, the conversion to film from digital became easy. So, the number of digital video films increased and they could pay for the cost of the film by selling it to TV. Thus, they made a film and sold it to TV if it was not successful in the cinema, or they made a film-making contract with TV. As TV needs some tele-films to show as movies, they made contracts with companies and film-makers to produce films. So, this equipment and the TV demand for cheap film-making helped expand low-budget film-making by digital cameras. In 1382, in the Farabi foundation we decided to help the private sector to acquire cinematic equipment and we gave most of our equipment to private-sector operators; we also gave them loans for non-linear editing and digital sound. These were Farabi loans and funds. We kept only the cameras because they were expensive and needed huge investment. But we still helped companies to produce equipment for camera movement and lighting.

AR: Let's focus on digital, for example sound.

RA: Yes, we gave sound recordists loans to buy digital devices for recording sound and we even imported devices for them.

AR: When did you give all of them new devices?

RA: I think all sound recording in cinema became digital from 1382 until 1384, and in 1386 all sound studios were refurbished technically. So, the conversion of digital to film and digital sound occurred in the 1380s. The Fajr Film Festival was converting film in 1382. So, it began in 1380, and (for example) with *Khoonbazi* again we see some developments and changes in quality. To sum up, the 1380s saw the peak in digital changes in Iran, and these were based on changes to TV in the 1370s in terms of TV production and documentaries.

AR: Have you ever provided loans for digital cameras?

RA: No, we gave them loans for equipment but some companies bought cameras. We have digital cameras such as Alexa in the private sector but the governmental sector had no digital cameras.

AR: What is your view on digitalisation in terms of managing cinema and controlling it?

RA: It is true and it is inevitable. The government parties have different ideas about that. For example, in some governments there is trust between government and artists. But in the event of pressure on film-makers and artists, the demand for control and inability to exercise it would produce an underground film-making movement. So there is a worry but it is an inevitable process and governments should adapt themselves to this process. So, governments that have more interaction with artists have more confidence.

AR: Can film festivals control film-making?

RA: They cannot control production. Exhibition needs governmental licences, so underground films cannot be exhibited officially. So, underground film-making has to remain underground until the time of communication with the audience.

AR: Is there a timetable for the Fajr Film Festival and digitalisation?

RA: We had a video section in the Fajr Film Festival in the early 1380s, and in the early 1390s video had a separate Festival. After that, if a film has a licence for cinematic production regardless of which kind of camera has been used, it can be in the Fajr Film Festival. Now we have good resolution in digital production and most of the film-makers use it.

**Safarian, Naser. Film-maker, board manager of the Iranian Documentary Film-makers Society. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 02/09/2012**

AR: Let's talk about the Documentary Film-makers Society. To what extent does digital cinema make them film-makers?

NS: When they find cameras very hard to use, they work more thoughtfully. The number of amateur film-makers has increased greatly. People could not easily say "I am a documentary film-maker" ten years ago. They consider themselves



professionals and this is the problem. For example, people used to apply for Society membership with two films. Now some applicants have ten films. For example, they submit a three-hour film that looks like unedited footage.

It looks like a fever. We should assess it after a while. Also, some members of the Society became members and then did not work for years. Some film-makers outside the society made a film and went to a lot of festivals but have not done any work for eight years. It may be an accident that makes a young person a film-maker but time will tell how long he will last in this career.

The young film-makers who came were not strong. There were some exceptions. But the previous generation was very good. For example, if 100 film-makers came after digitalisation, ten of them were good. However, 70 per cent of the previous generation were good. Creativity declines. The Society is just part of the population of documentary film-makers. If we want to assess more generally, just 2-3 per cent of the digital generation are any good. One exception who is young and works courteously is Loghman Khaledi. He has had his ups and downs but in this career he looks like a professional.

**Saharkhiz, Kamran. Pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran and digital post-production studio. Interview by Alireza Razazifar on 27/08/2012**

AR: Could you tell me about history of digital works and devices in studios in Iran?

KS: *Man Zamin Raa Doost Daram* was prepared in Besat Studio in Hoze Honari. They did tele-cinema for those special shots and then changed the shots by computer and recorded them again on film.

Generally, technology came to Iran prior to its utilization. We had computer editing software but no one used it. So they used mostly editing software which was specialised for video not cinema. Then, when the editing glue and the 7.5 tape became scarce, the danger was felt. However, Jafar Fatemi began the work sooner. He made a package including a tele-cinema device, non-professional software and a negative-cutting system. He was successful

regarding its propagation. *May Lady* was edited there. Of course, it was not standard and sometimes the sound did not sync, so it caused distrust.

Final Cut was cheaper than Avid. So everybody tended to use it. But we still did not have good tele-cinema. I made a system and studio Badi had one. We worked on *Dishab Babato Didam Ayda*, part of *Gilane*, *Bide Majnoon* and *Yek Tekke Nan*; we used standard methods and of course we added some things. Moeeini edited parts of *Max* by computer and finally Hasan Doost came here. I remember a seminar in IRIB about non-linear editing and then all the editors switched to digital.

However, the sound was before that time. Masoud Behnam and Keyvan Jahanshahi did digital sound design. Of course, it was partial but as soon as editing became digital, the cycle was completed and sound editors and designers accepted film and gave files. The sound designer chose Margin or Noendo as software. *Bide Majnoon* was made completely in digital and Mr Najafi recorded it by DAT. After 1-2 years, everything became digital.

Another turning point was the introduction of a new film recorder by Behnam. It could record a feature film in one week. There was a film recorder in Besat Studio which was imported by Saba but it did not work properly. But the film recorder of Behnam was modern. The first good work was *Khoonbazi* directed by Bani-Etemad. It was the first converted film of acceptable quality. It was colour-graded digitally and was the first film with double SR. It was filmed by Sony Z1.

We always suffered from financial problems in post-production but this solved the problems. Also, the number of films that used visual effects increased.

AR: What were the problems and negative points?

KS: Everyone has their own standards. The new generation came from computers to cinema. They do not obey cinematic standards. It is a kind of chaos.

AR: When did you start providing digital services?

KS: Roshana has provided digital cinematic services since 1379 but the first digital editing here was *Maxx* and then *Boutique*; we also did editing and sound designing for Majidi's film here.

AR: Can you tell me about before that time?

KS: The first system worked on Amiga computers. We started working with PCs after introducing the Perception editing board. There was another system called Video Machine and a hybrid system named Namadin in 1373 but they did not work properly.

Iran did not want to invest in editing suites, so they chose Final Cut. It does not matter when it was introduced; it is important because it became financially sufficient for editing in Iran and became pervasive. There were other things but they were not economical for users. In fact, for companies it was not economical until the government provided some free services to film-makers.

I remember a few points about software. Rasane Pouya used Avid Express DV which they used for *Banoo Ordibehesht*; there was also PAR, PVR and Matrox RT 2000 which was developed for DG Suite professionals.

**Salami, Masoud. DOP, pioneer of digital cinematography. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 27/09/2012**

AR: Would you update me about the usage of digital cameras in Iran?

MS: We are living in the third world and we are just consumers, so digital cinema in Iran is like this. Every six months or each year a new camera is introduced and each time this new camera becomes the fashion; they said, this is perfect, the converted picture is perfect. We want to convert it to 35mm and we are looking to achieve our aim. If you remember, we worked together with a JVC digital camera and we thought it was perfect; then we all discovered the problems and other kind of cameras were introduced, one after another until the SI2K. They said that it was the ultimate. So *Ekhrajihaa*, the best-selling Iranian movie, was made with it. *Ekhrajihaa 2* and *3* and also *Mohakme Dar Khiaban* by Kimiaei were made with it, *No One Knows about Persian Cats* by Bahman Ghobadi and so on. I worked with it in a film as we wanted to apply some

special effects to the film. However, after a while we found that the SI2K is not a good camera because it is recorded on Windows, so it has some problems. It was not what we expected. They magnified it because they told us that *Slumdog Millionaire* was made with this camera. I did some research and found that just a few scenes in Mumbai were filmed by SI2K. But we do not have the post-production facilities that they have. Our laboratory could not support that camera. Although the SI2K was OK, we went further with Red. Red was introduced and they said "This is the ultimate camera". Then we noticed that it is very heavy and bulky. Recently, I filmed a feature film called *Yeki Mikhahad Bahat Harf Bezanad* by Manochehr Hadi with it and converted the film to 35mm camera. I used Sony 5D and Red in this film because 30 per cent of it took place in a car and I could not work with Red because it was too big. So, I made 30 per cent of the film with 5D. The general filming technique was hand-held but it teased and caused trouble. It weighed 8kg. Red Epic was introduced recently. At the same time, Alexa was introduced. Mr Kalari filmed *Barf Rooye Kajha* with Alexa. However, we cannot deal with them in 4K resolution in post-production. We do not have good post-production in Iran. We had good recorders but they used 2k resolution and then recorded it on 35mm. I feel that they are playing with us and trying these out on us. Some film companies gain advantages from this situation. They advertise the camera, make money from it, and then the next camera arrives. The old camera goes out of date. This means that no one in Iran wants to work with SI2k now. They are looking for Red and 5D now. There are two Red Epics in Iran now and all film-makers are attracted to it. I heard about some new camera named Phantom and so on. I think that they are playing with us in the Middle East. Therefore, I cannot believe in a digital camera but a BL 35mm camera is still a 35mm camera for me. There is negative, it is exposed and then it is collected. All cinematographers can work with it. But digital cameras change continuously. At least, in Iran there is no stability. Maybe it happens elsewhere in the world as well but I think in Iran it is very fast. Every six months. I want to film a drama series and they all say "work with 5D, do not work with XD-Cam". But I know 5D has its own problems, in terms of pulling focus.

AR: In which conditions and circumstances do you prefer using digital cameras?

MS: Good question. This is my argument with my friends who insist on using just digital cameras. I am among the first cinematographers to work with a digital camera and convert it to 35mm. I think the script must tell you whether it needs digital filming or 35mm. There are some films and post-productions. Usually digital cameras should be hand-held, especially when your location is very tight or you want to work in a car, such as the works of Mr Kiarostami, who used a car as a location. So, the script says I need a digital camera. But if you want a big professional film for the box office, with big production and superstars, you should use a 35mm camera. The script tells you whether it is 35mm or digital. It is not just the ideas of people who say "we only believe in digital". At least, in Iranian cinema 35mm has a special situation. Our laboratory works with this method. We have not reached the level of complete transformation to digital. Even TV has not reached that level and does not show good quality HD. Of course, some folks take their work abroad for transformation to digital. They take them to Turkey and France. In 1359, I wanted to present the Iranian war 20 years ago and I wanted to show it like old 8m films; we also wanted to use Chroma Key, have some explosions and make the film seem old, so I preferred to use SI2K for those special scenes but I did not use it for the rest of the film - I used 35mm.

AR: What are the other factors that push you to digital filming?

MS: Particularly in lighting, if you do not want special lighting. Of course, if you want to approach digital very professionally, you should have very professional lighting. Sometimes they use hand-held cameras with under-exposure inside and over-exposure outside and claim it is an independent low-budget film. Usually, digital films are low-budget films in Iran, more independent films and more experimental films. Although Mr Kiamiaei used digital, he returned to 35mm. I think the same is true of Mr Mehrjooei. Low-budget films approach digital. It is an economic matter. But, from a cinematographer's point of view, if you want hand-held filming and do not want a lot of lighting and if you want intimacy with the camera and POV of actors, digital is appropriate.

AR: How many kinds of digital cameras have you worked with? Could you name them (and the films and directors) and briefly describe your attitude to them?

MS: PD 170 was the first one. I made *Anja* directed by Reza Kahani with it. I worked with Canon XL1 and XL2. Then H1. Panasonic and JVC. Then XDcam, X1 and X3. I worked with all of them. Even for short films. In *Mahkamin* by Rooholah Hejazi I worked with XL1. In the short films of Bahram Tavakoli I used XL1. *Anja* used Z1 (I should correct what I said previously). I used JVC for *Mana* which you directed. JVC had a lot of problems in fast pan. I used XD-Cam to make two tele-films. Then I used SI2K for *1359* and I used Red1 and 5D for Manochehr Hadi's film. Usually I use 5D in TV commercials.

AR: Do you believe that digital cameras make cinematography simpler? Do you think digital cameras have increased the number of cinematographers?

MS: One hundred per cent, for example, Red Epic can mend the mistakes of cinematographers, even 8 stop (under-exposing and over-exposing). This means "just put it and take the shot". Then in post-production you can change the temperature and so on. So, an ordinary cinematographer can do that. But it is impossible with a 35mm camera.

AR: So does it put the Guild of Cinematographers in danger?

MS: Of course, but I say that if a cinematographer does not have a special view, he is not a cinematographer. Part of cinematography is arranging the frame, movement and picture aesthetics and the psychology of lenses. If he does not know about these, you can make it good cinematography just by exposing a picture. Cinematographers are successful in digital if they come from negative and 35mm film-making. The guys who start from digital have not been successful in cinema yet. If you know about exposing in negative, you are more comfortable with digital and you know what you can change in colour grading and so on.

**Sedghi, M. Manager of digital post-production studio. Interview on 26/08/2012 by Alireza Razazifar**

AR: Can you explain the work of the digital studio here in Pishgaman and its history?

MS: It goes back ten years. They bought a film printer and scanner. But in 1387 it started again with the import of a computer from Germany and a scanner (PS Technique). The process of development started from 1387 and continued until 1388 when the DI chain was completed.

There was resistance at the beginning and they said “this equipment is bigger than the size of our cinema”. On the other hand, the Iranian cinema does not know about digital colour grading. But when the recorder was coming, we were booked up every day. We have the best equipment in the region. We have an ARRI Laser recorder and scanner. Our restoration software is one of the best. We used Fuji as material. The first restoration process was done here in Iran.

**Shidrang, Hooman. Board manager of a digital studio. Interview on 26/08/2012 by Alireza Razazifar**

AR: Would you explain the emergence and development of the digital studio here in Pishgaman?

HS: Mr Kamarani was one of the pioneers of cinema technology in Iran. This company belongs to his son Fariborz. Regarding the digitalisation process, the first idea for a digital studio was in 1387. So, they bought a film scanner. Then they bought an Arri Laser printer (recorder) and colour grading software and hardware in the same year. Then we had three printers and an Arri scanner. After a year, IRIB bought the same equipment for the Mokhtar TV series. Thus, the digital process was completed in 1388. Then we started development. Most of the cinematic activities in Iran take place in the second part of each year because of the Fajr Film Festival. We worked on 40 films last year, including films made by digital camera and films made by negative, and we scanned them.

We also do restorations of old films, such as *An Shab Ke Baroon Oomad* directed by Kamaran Shirdel. But our output is 2K. We do not do special effects. We solve the problem of archiving and storing film with this method.

AR: Can you tell me more about your input (digital cameras)?

HS: SI2K was imported in 1386 and Faraj Heydari was among the first to use it. Also, Alat Poush has good information. But the main role was for camera operators. And before that time, around the beginning, Kaveh Golestan met Kalari in the Farabi Foundation in 1373. Golestan introduced Kalari to the first digital camera before he died in the war. Anyway, I think Alatpoosh did the first tests with digital cameras but he did not work with them.

**Sokoot, Mohamdreza. DOP, pioneer of digital cinematography. Interview on 14/03/2012, by Alireza Razaziafar**

AR: In which conditions and circumstances do you prefer using digital cameras?

MS: I will start from the beginning. In the beginning, the usage of digital was inevitable instead of being research-based. The reason was the limitations of the production equipment. The digital cinema was shaping like a phenomenon such as dogma 95 and with the existence of some specialists in the West. The best cameras and equipment were not introduced to Iran. We used ordinary video cameras in cinema. I filmed *Moje Morde* in 1378 with Sony 135 and recorded it in DV format. I think it is video, not digital. This was because we had some limitations; we wanted to film on water and on fast ships, and it was impossible, considering the director's desire and shot lists, at least with that budget. Also, the director wanted to see the exposed rushes every night on location (Gheshm Island). Because of this pressure, we went for video and this camera was the best. Then we sent it to Austria for recording on 35mm film. Considering the format of filming, it looked good on the cinema screen. At the same time, *Once Upon A Time*, which was produced by Ms Taer Pour, was filmed by Beta-Cam video camera. The quality was within Iranian cinema standards. Then I filmed *Saghi* directed by Mohamad Reza Alami, produced by Hedayat films. I used the same format. It had a big screening and did well at the box office, and cinema-goers did not recognise that the format had changed. But I did not approach this digital format again.

Farabi Cinematic Foundation imported some new 35 mm cameras which solved some problems and they worked for us until professional HD was introduced to Iran recently. Lots of equipment has been imported to Iran over the last two



years, including Alexa cameras. We even filmed the historical TV series with Red.

So, limitation of sources and equipment was the cause of the introduction of digital in Iran but since then we have tried to update ourselves with world technology. Nowadays, a lot of professionals such as Alatpoosh and Kalari work with digital cameras. Knowledge has grown and the Internet helps this, whereas previously we just waited for companies and IRIB to introduce something.

Mr Kamrani and Studio Badi imported some laser film recorders recently. Badi Studio has an ARRI-laser and it gives us better results.

AR: So?

MS: The camera I choose is related to the script and the director's ideas. Because of technology, film-makers are more comfortable writing scripts, and digital cameras give us an opportunity to use better effects, but if we use 35mm cameras our laboratories are old and not up to date. We have only three laboratories. So, even if we film in 35mm, we prefer to scan the negative and finally re-record it on 35mm because the analogue system does not work even for simple effects. Also, in some situations we need lighter cameras. There is a new movement of hand-held film-making in Iran now. 7-8 out of 10 films made last year used the hand-held technique. This is difficult with 35mm cameras but we can easily use complicated movements with digital cameras, such as running with actors. Anyway, it makes work easier in practice and gives more facilities in post-production.

As we do not have good digital exhibition, we still convert final copies to negatives. In France 60 per cent of cinema theatres have digital projectors now. So, we will not have any 35mm in future.

This is the part that old cinematographers cannot accept or deal with. They say we trust these projectors now. Also, it partially relates to lack of interest in digital among some old cinematographers and lack of knowledge and study of the industry. With the old method they did a test and recognised over- and under-exposing conditions. They won't lose their special skills.

AR: Do you believe that digital cameras make cinematography simpler? Do you think digital cameras have increased the number of cinematographers?

MS: There are advantages and disadvantages in digitalisation. The advantage and positive point is for those of us who consider ourselves professionals. It is easy to bring ourselves up to date. The negative aspect is the invasion of people with little experience or knowledge who have a very simple attitude to cinema and they call themselves cinematographers. Unfortunately, inexperienced producers, because of their lack of knowledge, work with cinematographers who ask for 1/5 of the wages we earn and can work with digital cameras. Even a child can work with these, but the mind behind the camera is important. I have worked with Red cameras and filmed three minutes a day for three years but there are some cinematographers earning half what I earn and who film 15 minutes each day.

You can see a vulgarity in the use of digital cameras. They are lightweight, so the cinematographers do some absurd and inartistic movements with them. The worth of the equipment is dependent on the man who works with it. IRIB has the most digital production but they do not classify works based on cinematography. They classify works based on script and director. A set designer should know about the effects of certain colours in digital cameras.

**Soori, Fereydoon. Merchant, pioneer in digital camera trading. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 23/08/2012**

AR: When did you sell your first digital camera? What was it? Who bought it?

FS: The first digital camera that I imported was a DSR9000 Sony. I sold it to Reza Mirkarimi, Kane Sabz Office in 1379. I imported a DSR200, which I gave to Bijan Birang. They consumed DV-Cam tape. DSR9000 was compatible with DV-Cam and also small tape. I also imported MX10 at the same time and I gave the first one to a TV producer. They were really the first ones in Iran. Then I imported HDV Sony cameras. I gave them to Esmaeil Afife and Sasan Tavakoli. In fact, the first Digital HD was imported by me. I forget the dates. Then we imported HD, XD-Cam and so on.

AR: Let's go back to DSR9000; how many did you import?

FS: No, the first one was hand-carried by me. I gave it to Parviz Zahed who worked with Mirkarimi. Then I imported more, each time 4-5 cameras. DSR9000 and 200 were imported at almost the same time. I gave one of them to Gholamhosein Eskandari, a TV producer. DSR 200 was the next step

AR: What about DSR 100?

FS: DSR 100 was not at that time. It is a newer version. There was the smaller Sony FX10 camera which was DV. But 9000 and 200 were DV-Cam.

AR: So, the first one was FX series or DSR9000?

FS: FX10. Almost at the same time in 1377 or 1378. We were in another place. Ordinary people bought the FX series. Also, a professional who used hidden cameras, Mr Ghahrai, bought it.

AR: When did the digital camera become popular, which of them was most popular and which of them was bought by professionals?

FS: After the first generation. PD150 and PD170 came. Film-makers who made wedding ceremony films used the 150, which sold very well. Even when it was replaced by the PD170, people still used the older version. This was around 1381-82.

AR: Mr Mostafavi talked about DSR 100...

FS: They were Panasonic. It was not DSR. It was 100 and it was imported at the time of the 150; that was a good camera.

AR: I asked about before that time.

FS: No, just the 200. Of course there was DSR-PD100; it was very small and was a very good camera. I sold it to Mohamed Inanloo. There was another version, the 900 without a monitor, which was good for those working with under-water cover. PD100 had a monitor. All of them came after 9000 and 200. Sometimes I imported both of them at the same time.

AR: When did you sell your first digital editing software?

FS: There were some editing suites, first the Panasonic MX10 and then the MX50. I sold a lot of MX1 Videonics, around 200, in the short term. They are separate devices. It was linear editing.

AR: I asked about non-linear editing?

FS: I imported FX 300, 500, 800 but they were expensive and we could not sell them. They are also big.

AR: What about an editing board matched with a computer? Actually, I am asking about them because they are more important and influential in this case

FS: I imported everything, you name it. I imported the first digital camera when no one knew about them, and others just followed me because I had experience and knowledge. I did not import Avid, they had a representative in Iran. But now these companies are closed, most of them. Tehran Faraje also imported this stuff.

**Tavakolifarsani, Sasan. Pioneer in digital visual effects in Iran. Interviewed by Alireza Razazifar on 24/03/2012**

AR: Could you tell me about the history of digital visual effects in Iran?

ST: Saeid Amini imported devices for animation and frame recording of 3D Studio. It could capture videos. They worked on video. When you capture a video on a computer, you can do a lot of things. It was the beginning of mixing real pictures with animation, and in 1372 we had some commercials that used PAR boards. In fact, the editing and colour correction were matters for filmmakers and then deleting something from a picture. Then, Adobe After Effect was introduced in 1375.

The software was more advanced than our capabilities in Iran. There was some free software we worked with for a while. If we paid for it we used it better. So specialists were very rare. The technicians who used crack version of special effects software psychologically did not try to achieve the best performance from them because they did not pay for it.

We still have problems with directors because they look at everything financially and do not have background knowledge. Most visual effects have some awkward actions in scenes. The best visual effect is the one you do not notice. Unfortunately, they do not consider adequate budgets for it in films, and only after filming do they think about visual effects. So, the filming was not sufficient for the visual effect and we just deceived audiences.

There have been visual effects since 1374 but the group who worked on them had no academic knowledge and simply learned by experience. They gradually moved from optical effects to computer visual effects. The first work was Youth Cinema commercials, which were a mixture of animation and computer visual effects; sometimes the rendering process lasted for five months. We used Amiga until 1371 but there was no software and we worked with Photoshop. We have no big visual effects here because we have no roots and culture for them. We even do blue screen unprofessionally. They do not pay attention to colour and light.

I did little cinematic work. For example, the biggest problem with *Tehran 1500* was the rendering. There are some specialists who were educated abroad but they neither returned nor arranged a team. Teamwork is very hard in Iran.

My best work was the *She Is An Angel* series. I directed its visual effects. I worked on the *Sharyar* series. I changed the bazaar roof in four layers. I also worked on the *Salhaye Barf Va Banafshe* series, which had the best TV visual effects that year.

To sum up, it started in 1370 and reached a peak in the 1380s because computers became more powerful and Apple was introduced in Iran. Experience and completion were also important. However, we still suffer from a lack of good equipment.

We have around four teams in Iran but the best team is Dr Motamedi's team. We mostly use After Effect and rarely use 3D software. We are not strong at making objects. They cannot make anything in detail. So, they used real objects and inserted them into films. The Internet is also very useful for improving our knowledge. Although we have software problems and problems in importing equipment, we have talented technicians and artists.

